BECOMING-POOR, BECOMING-ANIMAL, BECOMING-PLANT… BECOMING-IMPERCEPTIBLE

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF EVERYDAY ENERGY ASSEMBLAGES IN TRANSITION

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ANNEX 1:
Specimen layout for Declaration/Statements page to be included in a thesis.

DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

Signed Date 10th December 2018

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD.

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STATEMENT 2

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated, and the thesis has not been edited by a third party beyond what is permitted by Cardiff University's Policy on the Use of Third Party Editors by Research Degree Students. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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to Giuseppe,
who lives on in-between these lines

"Ti piace essere venuto a questo mondo?"
Bamb.: "Sì, perché c'è la STANDA".

Che sarà della neve
che sarà di noi?
Una curva sul ghiaccio
e poi e poi... ma i pini, i pini
tutti uscenti alla neve, e fin l'ultima età
circondata da pini. Sic et simpliciter?
E perché si è - il mondo pinoso il mondo nevoso -
perché si è fatto bambucci-ucci, odore di cristianucci, perché si è fatto noi, roba per noi?

Da: "Sì, ancora la neve"
Andrea Zanzotto, *La Beltà* (1968)

"Are you glad you came into this world?"
Child: "Yes, because there's the STANDA[1]*"*

What will it be of the snow
what will it be of us?
A curve on the ice
and then and then… but the pines, the pines
all emerging to the snow, and until the last age
surrounded by pines. Sic et simpliciter?
And why has it – the piney world the snowy world –
why has it become fe-fi-fo-fum kiddie, smell of an Englishman, why has it become us,
stuff for us?

Extract from: "Yes, the snow again"
Andrea Zanzotto, *La Beltà* (1968)

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[1] STANDA, "Il Supermercato degli Italiani" ["Italians' Supermarket"], is the first chain of supermarkets and department stores in Italy. Founded in 1931 in Milan, it was present in many Italian cities for decades and embodied the consumerist spirit of the newly affluent middle-classes. The brand is no longer in use.

Summary

The 2008 financial crisis has meant for the West a wider social, political and economic questioning of its underpinnings, especially in the light of an increasingly evident ecologic crisis. The unsustainability of capitalist, post-industrial, consumer economies opens space for challenging their drive to infinite growth, but large-scale institutional change lags behind. I investigate the potentiality of the everyday as a site of ecological – but also political – resistance, difference and creation. Through a multimodal and multimedia participant observation study, I focus on everyday energy use transitions in the context of the crisis. I draw and expand upon recent reflections that seek to go beyond the limitations of linguistic constructionism as the guiding approach to critical qualitative social science. I give special attention to the ways in which language and discourses co-emerge with, and are co-constitutive of, the material, affective and non-representational qualities of experience, among which desiring and unconscious dimensions. The latter, though, are conceptualised as trans-human flows that traverse and shape the (social) world and not as subjective, interior or personal. Hence, focussing on desire is also a way to address the political and power-ridden aspects of energy use, little addressed in current research. I look at the ways in which collective desire shapes the energy "assemblages" that we live through in ordinary life, mapping them as they are stabilised and challenged along lines of (ecological) becoming. If the dominant (libidinal) economy gears towards hyper-consumption and intensive energy practices, are everyday desires evading this dynamic? To what extent are they capable of a *radical creation* of more ecologically sensitive, life affirmative, assemblages? I bring attention to the chances and risks of emerging "lines of flight" from our unsustainable economy and reflect on the politics and ethics of the social sciences in drawing lines of transitions towards sustainability.

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Contents

Chapter One

Introduction: Why this study

Our time seems a stretched present, a moment of *impasse*, of crises (Berlant 2011). Of these, one of the most intractable is ecological. Climate change, pollution, depletion of natural resources, food insecurity, diminishing biodiversity, etc. are pointing to the fact that human beings are impacting on the earths' ecosystems to the point of modifying them potentially without return. This contingency opens bleak scenarios for the survival of humanity and other beings on earth. The past decades have seen a number of propositions regarding the mitigation of anthropogenic ecological disruption. Faith in technological development has led some to believe in a 'business as usual' model where economic growth and development co-exist with, and indeed are enhanced by, sustainability imperatives – as with "green growth" and "ecological modernization" (Oels 2006; Hajer 1995; Foster 2012). Yet, this assumption has been questioned on a number of grounds. Most straightforwardly, these models are failing to provide solutions – at least quickly enough (Benton 2002). But this already suggests that there might be deeper structural impediments. In particular, the link between capitalism, industrialisation and much of today's ecological disruption has been denounced for decades and is nowadays largely uncontested. Old and new critics have argued that capital's structural necessity to infinitely grow (competitively) entails an inevitable clash, or "contradiction" (O'Connor 1991), with the ecology of a finite planet (Gorz 1980; Luke 1999; Bookchin 1991; Sarkar 1999; Zerzan 2002; Latouche 2010; Foster 2017; Alier 2002; Jackson 2009; Harris 2013)[2].

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[2] This remains true despite claims to "dematerialisation" and "decoupling". It is becoming increasingly evident that 'dematerialising' technological development itself depends on very material infrastructures that are not at all 'light' either in their production or disposal (Sayer 2014; for an early critique see Georgescu-Roegen 2003, 1973, 1975). This is the case, for instance, of the digital economy, which makes communication 'light' and apparently immaterial because it is based on the exchange of digital signals instead of objects; and yet, it involves energy-intensive and difficult-to-dispose supports (e.g. laptops, smartphones, hardwares, etc.) (Leonardi 2018). Furthermore, much economic growth continues to be based on the consumption of material goods and/or services that imply a large material-energetic input, as in the case of eco-efficient housing (Hagbert and Bradley 2017). Finally, although there are evidences for a *relative* decoupling of economic growth and resource/energy consumption (i.e. the amount of "material throughput" required per GDP unit *has* diminished in the last decades), no *absolute* decoupling has happened – implying that in as far as the world economy grows, so does

There is no unified dogma as to *what* responses to ecological problems are preferable, as they range from a limits-to-growth politically moderate approach (Barry 2007; Jackson 2009) to eco-anarchist and libertarian calls for a more or less complete rethinking of civilization as we know it (Zerzan 2002; Bookchin 1991; Illich 1973), through socialism (Sarkar 1999; Benton 2002; Foster 2017), communism (Marcuse 1972; 1992; Žižek 2009) and de-growth (Alier 2009; Latouche 2010). Despite their diversity, these approaches agree that the unsustainability of our economy also has socio-political aspects. For instance, economic growth starts to be divorced from generalised human wellbeing because its benefits, risks and ecological side-effects are increasingly unequally distributed (Jackson 2009). Hence, ecological critique becomes coextensive with political, social, cultural and philosophical reflections about our life-world (Gorz 1980; Foster 2017; Leonardi 2018; Nebbia 1994; Soper 1990)[3].

Although this thesis is no space for an in-depth consideration of these debates, it shares the critical ecology premise that sustainability requires an overall rethinking of our socio-economic organisation. This differs from the current mainstream environmental policy approach, which promotes change at the level of localised and specific practices or pieces of technology (e.g. behaviour change strategies or "smart" energy systems) (Forde 2017). It is guided by the commitment of a critical environmental sociology to find new, autonomous and independent ways to investigate and understand how contemporary western lifestyles clash with sustainability objectives (Blühdorn and Welsh 2007). But despite embracing a strong political commitment, research is not geared towards the production of a pre-defined goal. Surely it is, as sustainability research more generally, guided by a standpoint: the belief that human actions should be less ecologically disruptive both on global and local scale. Yet, I try to resist the pre-definition of what exactly the 'good practices' of sustainability are, out of a commitment not to impose on both analysis and social collectives a given political agenda. The concrete form of possible sustainable transitions should immanently emerge from empirical engagement with the field (Frigo 2017).

In line with this, I investigate everyday life and the spontaneous movements that,

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our overall material-energetic consumption and waste production (Hobson 2013b: esp. 1086-7).

[3] One author questioning that fairer and more inclusive societies would be necessarily best suited for confronting environmental problems is Rocheleau (1999). Yet, he does not go into overly different directions when he finally concedes that "Economic Democracy" would be a good political arrangement in this sense.

starting from lived experience, open up opportunities for new ecologies (Schlosberg and Coles 2015; Salleh 2016; 2017). That in everyday life there is an ecological-political import follows from some observations. First, social organisation rests not only on institutional arrangements but also on certain (political) subjectivities that are embodied in the smallest practices of production and reproduction of life (Althusser 2001; Foucault 1998). Further, everyday life is made of apparently private acts that are nonetheless thoroughly "environmentally significant" because, summed up, are having detrimental effects on the planet (Jagers et al. 2014: 441; Coole and Frost 2010; Hagbert and Bradley 2017)[4]. These practices are also being politicised in what Schlosberg and Coles (2015: 165; see also Meyer and Kersten 2016) call "the new environmentalism of everyday life": "collective and reconstructive responses to the unsustainable institutions and practices in which … lives are immersed". Finally, attention to the everyday as the sphere of *reproduction* is in line with ecofeminist and de-colonial approaches that emphasise how this sphere can (quite literally) embody "the capacity for meeting needs while 'holding' together material/energetic exchanges in ecological systems" (Salleh 2017: 13-14; see also Shiva 2017).

From this perspective, sustainable transitions cannot be reduced to the mere quantitative shrinking of energy and resource consumption. Rather, it needs – as Raymond Williams (2013) proposed – a socio-political re-articulation of "livelihood": the complex space of existence in which production, consumption, relationships between generations and care for the environment encounter each other (Barnett 2013: xii). But talking in terms of subjectivity also means that it is important to study this field in its experiential, lived and meaningful relationality – with a special emphasis on affective qualities as they arise in proximate as well as distant social relations (Groves et al. 2017). In turn, this means acknowledging that there is an 'intractability' and irreducible-ness, but also a "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990), that makes everyday practices difficult to quickly reshuffle via acts of governance.

This does not mean that they cannot reserve creative and unforeseen potential for change *from within*. And in this respect, there are opportunities and challenges in the fact of living in a moment of cris*es*. The 2008 financial crisis, arguably still ongoing, intersects with the becoming-evident of ecological degradation. Both reinforce the impression of

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[4] Indeed, as geologists have introduced the concept of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) to indicate a geological era marked by the significant presence of human-made products in soils stratification and ecosystems, all these human actions reveal themselves as active component of planetary evolution as such (Morton 2012; Haraway 2015).

capitalism's unsustainability on environmental *and* social fronts (Rifkin 2016; Leichenko et al. 2010). Further, at least in the West, the difficulty of dealing with these issues at institutional level is generating a "legitimation crisis" (see Habermas 1973) that puts into question Western democratic liberal politics (Harris 2013). These intersecting *impasses* are such that our present potentially becomes a space of reconfiguration despite no specific trajectory delineating yet: this is its de-stabilising but also potentially creative character (Tienhaara 2014; Schor 2014). Hence, on the premise that capitalist (post)industrialisation and ecological damage are related, I ask whether the financial crisis can become an opportunity for socio-economic change towards sustainability (Jackson 2009; Schneider et al. 2010). How far can such a change emerge from everyday life? Finally, in terms of the politics of subjectification, to what extent can sustainable practices co-emerge with changing values of the 'good life', sensitivities and modes of being-in-the-world (Chicchi 2018)?

Studying everyday energy transitions is indeed no novel undertaking: one could say that any study concerning changing domestic habits, consumption patterns, mobility, leisure choices and the like tries to accomplish this (see §2). The contribution I would like to make to this array of studies concerns primarily a commitment to come to grips with the ecology of the everyday as an integrated whole. This implies investigating seriously and jointly the disparate elements that coalesce in its ambiguous space: material and symbolic, private and political, biography and world history, etc. (Henwood et al. 2015). I also bring an attention to *desire* that is less than common in the context of sustainable transitions studies. Trying to integrate all this means a joint interest in political economy, materials and objects, processes, practices, discourses and affects – and, as such, my study is situated at the crossroads of critical ecology and critical theory, sociology, practice theory, discourse studies and the psychosocial tradition.

Because of the broad scope of my research question, and inspired by work such as the *Energy Biographies* project (see §2.4.2), I took *everyday energy use* as an entry point for investigation. Energy in fact permeates our relations to the natural and material world, allowing us to produce and reproduce life; we use it as we engage in any practice – be it work, travel, heating, talking, laughing, knitting; it is embodied in all the things we live by, accumulate, discard or manipulate. Finally, it is at the forefront of environmental concerns since certain kinds of energy production and consumption are responsible for the most troublesome side-effects of human presence on earth, like climate change (Hagbert and Bradley 2017). Literature often refers to energy "consumption" instead of energy use (e.g. Shove and Warde 2002; Spaargen and Oosterveer 2010). I deliberately chose to avoid the former phrase: I wanted to rhetorically distance this study from what often is an unthoughtful reduction of the everyday to consumption practices, its colonisation by capitalist verbiage. This is in line with Williams's (2013) suggestion that ecology should be understood not in terms of what we consume (which accepts the deep logic of the market in treating everything as raw material) but as a 'how we live' question (Barnett 2013: xiii; see also Lefebvre 2014). Furthermore, talking about "consumption", to my sensitivity, tends to emphasise energy exchanges in terms of appropriation, sovereign manipulation, generation of waste and entropy. This downplays the circular, symbiotic, co-constitutive and regenerative, *neg*entropic dynamics that also characterise ecologies (Ingold 2011: 9-10; Salleh 2017).

But how to go about studying such an admittedly complex and ambitious field of research? The question poses itself both in terms of ontology/epistemology and of methodology: a framework is needed that helps one investigate everyday energy use in its material as well as symbolic aspects, avoiding reductionisms and essentialising dualisms (Morton 2012; Salleh 2016; 2017). In line with theoretical and empirical literature in the social sciences, the effort is to give back recognition to a material world too often disregarded by the (postmodern) turn to language, while avoiding the danger of positivistically reducing it to an objective reality (Coole and Frost 2010; Barad 2003; MacLure 2013b).

One of the possible ways to do so, also attuned with the study of everyday life, is looking at *experience* as that sphere in which social discourses, personal biographies and material cultures are brought to bear on one another; where material objects, practices and structure dynamically interweave with discourses in a relational and mutual process of becoming, involving bodies affecting and being affected – textures of pleasure, hate/love, ache, indifference, sound, touching, smelling, attraction and repulsion… On this apparently 'micro' level, "global forms are articulated in specific situations – or territorialized in *assemblages*": they cease to be abstract issues to become concrete ones, open to empirical investigation (Ong and Collier 2005: 4; see also Hannigan 2002). It thus allows a view of energy use from the immanent perspective that the everyday seems to require (Smith and High 2017; Frigo 2017).

I therefore designed an ethnography of everyday energy use that would look at trajectories of change that are 'small scale' but always critically related to the global. Much inspired in this journey by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (alone and with

Guattari), I found myself part of an emerging problematisation in the social sciences: "post-representational" and/or "post-qualitative" research (see Coleman and Ringrose 2013; MacLure 2013b). I dialogue with, and contribute to, this emerging stream albeit in a partially critical way. Another tradition that this study intersects is Marxism and a contemporary renewed interest in non-reductionist critique of political economy/ecology. But if the way out of reductionism has often been identified in a 'cultural turn' for Marxism (see Jessop 2004; Jessop and Oosterlynk 2008), this study partially resists appealing to a semiotic world as opposed to *the world* as such. In line with Marx himself, I maintain that human beings are part of *material* as well as semiotic cultures that shape actions and desires in particular, power-inflected, ways (Gabrys 2014). Further, and relatedly, I bring an interest in bodies as (material) sites of affects and desire that carry their own life-ethics (Blackman and Venn 2010).

This complex and multifaceted journey starts by situating my empirical study within the wider literature on sustainable transitions in everyday life (§2). A brief interlude (§3) on "the everyday" follows: I thought it important to make explicit my use of the concept, as it can be a very obscure, catch-all one. A chapter in which I deal in more detail with the ways I have engaged with Deleuzian philosophy (§4) starts to raise questions around ontology, epistemology, politics, ecology, ethics and knowledge production. Chapter 5 reflexively explains how research questions and theoretical preoccupations resulted in the design of an in-depth, multimodal and multimedia participant observation and qualitative interviewing study. It lays the ground for chapter 6, where I narrate a series of everyday energy experiences as examples of "becoming", in the Deleuzian sense of the phrase. In the last chapter (§7) I draw some lines together, expand on some general patterns, reflect on possible avenues of future investigation and highlight the contributions that my thesis brings to the field of energy transitions and of ecological thought and research.

Although the structure of the thesis is rather conventional, writing has been experimental, at least in as far as the analysis chapter is concerned. This is also part of a wider field of literature (e.g. Stewart 2007; Lather 1995; Seremetakis 1993) with which I relate in a critical dialogue.

A note on the use of the first person singular. Writing as an 'I' has gained acceptance and favour within qualitative research: the mark of social sciences' progressive emancipation from the 'objectivity' pursued in the (frustrated) effort to imitate the positivism of the natural sciences[5]. But if the first-person singular helps highlighting the constructedness, partiality and contingency of knowledge; it also risks reterritorialising its questioning of scientific authoritativeness on the "full body" of the researcher as conscious, reflexive individual. We risk losing sight of all that is *not* in our control and yet intervenes in the research situation: unconscious investments, contingent factors, events; our being-a-multitude, a dynamic patchwork. But there would be little sense in reverting to depersonalised language and its presumption to let 'reality' speak by erasing the body-researcher altogether. There have been attempts to use the third person as a means to produce de-subjectivation (e.g. Stewart 2007), but a simple shift from a 'me' to a 's/he' does not warrant the avoidance of personhood. "Technonarcissim" is not of help in disrupting established ways of thinking and doing. For "the multiple", we need a "method that effectively constructs it": keeping our names but for making "ourselves unrecognizable", rendering "imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 22; 3). I will therefore continue to use the first person singular, but the reader should be advised that this involves far more (or indeed, far less) than an individual subject.

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[5] Which in the meantime have themselves abandoned that paradigm (Carravetta 2009).

Chapter two

Everyday energy use and transitions to sustainability – some existing studies and approaches

The literature on everyday energy use and sustainable transitions is vast. This is particularly true now that environmental issues are coming to the forefront of political agendas and academic research is thereby encouraged. My review is necessarily partial (although not willingly *partisan*) and mostly aims at representing my own engagement with it, marking the key encounters leading to the design of this study. It is also varied, as relevant studies do not sit in one defined category: “sustainable transitions in everyday uses of energy” can encompass more than what a simple search by these keywords would yield. For instance, studies on change in household energy consumption resulting from the introduction of a certain policy will not make explicit reference to the “everyday” as such, or to “transitions”, despite implying these dimensions. I start from where my engagement with literature on sustainability started, which is also what spurred the academic debate at issue: ‘mainstream’ policy approaches.

2.1. Mainstream approaches and their critiques

To understand the nature of mainstream policy approaches, it is necessary to remember that they arise within a specific political culture, which we can broadly call neoliberal governmentality[6]. Diffident of regulatory policies and faithful to the idea that society is a sum of autonomous and sovereign individuals, it seeks to change society mainly by changing individuals’ behaviour (Slocum 2004). The core concern is thus how to make people act in ways that exert less pressure on the earth’s ecosystems. Everyday

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[6] Briefly, this emerged as a result of important socio-economic changes during the last decades of the XX century, particularly the decline of the welfare state model together with that of the socialist model of USSR. The apparent triumph of free-market capitalism as *the* global(ised) economic system started a process of neoliberalisation of politics. Governments moved from “traditional command-and-control” strategies to “softer and more flexible regulation” policies – not so much based on their efficacy but rather on a political fit with current global politics (Tews et al. 2003: 579; see also Pellizzoni 2012; Oels 2006; Heynen et al. 2007; Dal Gobbo 2016).

life is one of the privileged spaces for interventions as it is one of those spheres on which individuals are thought to have most control. As consumption is considered a central aspect of people's private *and public*[7] life, individuals are constructed as rational consumers who reflexively and autonomously perform choices in the market (Dietz et al. 2007; Butler et al. 2014; Groves et al. 2015).

Since similar 'anthropological' premises suggest that people would choose to consume what is most convenient in monetary terms, among the favoured policy instruments are financial measures like incentives, tax reductions and energy taxation (Geller et al. 2006). Furthermore, the provision of information is considered important, in the belief that knowing about the financial or ecological benefits of a certain product should lead people to choose it. Campaigns, social marketing, labelling are thus another important policy strategy (Gillingham et al. 2009; McKenzie-Mohr 1994, 2000; Tews et al. 2003; Geller et al. 2006). Merging the two concerns of tapping information-deficit and relying on people's calculating self-interest, self-measurement instruments like household energy consumption meters have been introduced in the expectation that awareness of the impact and cost of practices would produce behaviour change (Boyd et al. 1995).

However, evidence for the effectiveness of these measures is uncertain (Gillingham et al. 2009) if not outright dismissive (Heynen et al. 2007). For one thing, people do not act solely according to rational calculation: other elements intervene, like education, beliefs, attitudes, demography and socio-economic factors (Hards 2012). These, constructed as psychological or social variables have been used to identify discrete and measurable causes of pro-environmental behaviour, or lack thereof (see Dietz et al. 1993; 2007; Stern 1986; 2000; Faiers et al. 2007; Halkier et al. 2011; Longhi 2013; Jagers 2009; Jagers et al. 2014; Jagers and Matti 2015). Accordingly, the key to drive behaviour change is thought to be the promotion of variables that correlate with pro-environmental attitudes. Policy models like 'ABC' (Attitude-Behaviour-Choice) for instance believe that making people acquire the 'right' attitudes via information and education will result in responsible, sustainable, choices (Shove 2010a; Darnton 2004). Yet, neither the studies nor the policies have yielded appreciably conclusive results (Jackson and Michaelis 2003; Helm 2008; Webb 2012; Hargreaves 2011; Sayer 2014). A "value-action gap" (Shove 2010a: 4) intervenes: subscription to a set of pro-environmental values as measured by

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[7] As concepts like the "consumer-citizen" testify (see Doubleday 2004; Johnston 2008; Slocum 2004; Berglund and Matti 2006; Barr et al. 2011).

psychological variables is no coherent predictor of pro-environmental behaviour (Jagers and Matti 2015; Nye and Hargreaves 2009).

We are led to believe that the causal chain whereby from certain interiorly held norms and values linearly derive attitudes and, in turn, behaviours is too simplistic if not altogether misguided (Nye and Hargreaves 2009; Groves et al. 2016). Thaler and Sunstein (2008) advocate the "nudge" strategy as a corrective: in a curious reversal, it is now the manipulation of the 'outside', i.e. the physical environment in which consumption choices happen, that should lead individuals to behave in the 'right' way. For instance, if I make a 'non-print' option for receipts default, it will be far more likely that one chooses not to be provided with the hard-copy. People are given easy and ready-made behavioural solutions to adopt, which in time will become ingrained in their everyday behaviours (John et al. 2009). But despite its promise for easy and quick fixes to the problem of unsustainable everyday practices, "nudge" has not yielded the profound changes needed (Hobson 2013b; Webb 2012).

That we are witnessing energy demand and CO_2 emissions constantly increasing globally (Helm 2008; Bullard 2011) signals a failure of mainstream policy models and calls for a complete reconceptualization, particularly of their overly individualistic and reductionist character (Groves et al. 2016). Choices, rationality and efficiency are not enough: life practices are embedded in wider socio-cultural and material infrastructures that partly determine them. Furthermore, the social and personal significance of consumption should be considered (Henwood et al. 2015; Jackson and Michaelis 2003). Until these are tackled, social actors are likely to feel powerless in making an effective change – even if, and maybe *because*, they subscribe to these individualizing and moralizing discourses of 'green' consumption (Autio et al. 2009). Hence, a sustainable transition cannot "depend on policy makers persuading individuals to make sacrifices, specified with reference to taken for granted benchmarks of normal non sacrifice" (Shove 2010a: 6; see also 2010b), but instead needs to take place within a wider transition of socio-technical and political arrangements.

The "paternalistic" and individualised strategies (Lury 2011: 8) outlined above tend to moralise a certain number of banal everyday practices, like leaving lights on or the TV in standby, by constructing them as 'wrong' behaviours. Hence, they position citizens in power-laden ways that have thoroughgoing socio-cultural, material and psychosocial effects (Henwood and Pidgeon 2015; Shove and Walker 2007). They have governmental connotations (in a Foucaultian sense) since they mobilise ethics and morality as a matter of shaping and controlling subjects, who are thereby subject*ed* to a pre-established order of what 'sustainability' is: switch-off lights, insulate your house, recycle, go vegan (Rose 1990)[8]. There is no space here for a thoroughgoing political critique of this approach to government[9]. For now, it suffices to notice that these individualised strategies are problematic, according to the view here endorsed (see §1), in as far as they prevent social actors from thinking in collective terms and divert attention from the wider economy and corporate, political and institutional accountability. And since these are arguably the levels and scales where most significant change could take place quickly enough, this kind of governmentality can be criticised first of all for its ineffectiveness (Butler 2010; Webb 2012; Khan and Minio-Paluello 2014).

Partially in response to these challenges, the multi-level perspective (MLP) proposes to shift attention to innovations in socio-technical regimes as drivers of change (e.g. the introduction of integrated photovoltaic energy production infrastructures). These spread and are adopted in non-linear ways that depend on historical contingencies, politics, economics, geographical specificities, power structures, etc. (Foxon 2011; Geels 2010; Markard et al. 2012). MLP aims to contribute to governments' energy transition management by monitoring these variables as new systems are introduced, with the aim of enhancing possibilities of success (Elzen et al. 2004). Its merit is that of shifting attention from individual change to the interconnecting and mutually dependent paths of emergence of new energy provision systems. Yet, MLP has been criticised for a neglect of the role that civil society actors have in producing and adopting innovation; relatedly, it does not tackle the ways in which sociotechnical assemblages are made to endure via banal, daily, habitual practices of ordinary citizens (Hargreaves et al. 2012). Finally, talking about transitions *management* repeats rather than solves questions around the depoliticising effects of technocratically constructing 'sustainability' as a given problem with given solutions because it silences the political debate around what sustainability is

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[8] For a critical review of the Foucaultian debates around political consumerism, citizenship and governmentality see: Pellizzoni (2012).

[9] This would involve taking issue with complex philosophical and political considerations about (among other things) freedom, self-determination, democracy. Why this kind of governmentality deserves at least some critical scrutiny from our perspective will be considered in §4. I believe it is worth acknowledging here Salleh's (2017) critical view on this approach. She points out that this framing of ecological (un)sustainability has strong patriarchal connotations: since the domestic sphere is mainly inhabited by women, it is on them that responsibility for ecological change falls by default. And this is all the more paradoxical as the great part of environmental degradation is related to industrial and other corporate enterprises mainly controlled by men (or at any rate responding to a patriarchal power structure).

and for whom (Shove and Walker 2010; Shove 2010b; Swyngedow 2010; Kenis and Levins 2014).

2.2. Qualitative contributions to the debate: meanings, interactions, discourses and representations

These critiques have been seriously taken up by qualitative researchers. Differently from those mentioned above – who mainly work through the quantitative analysis of energy consumption trends or individual attitudinal/behavioural variables – qualitative social scientists seek to approach everyday life as lived and experienced in context. By addressing meanings as they relate to wider discourses, they at once consider both the social *and* the individual level intersecting and meshing (Butler et al. 2014; Hards 2012). They highlight that sustainability and other risk issues are largely constructed through meaning-making and discursive systems, which social subjects take up for making sense of, and for acting in, the world. These encourage or prevent transitions in environmentally relevant practices and thus need to be considered by government interventions (Henwood and Pidgeon 2015; 2016).

One important contribution is the recognition that the meanings people attribute to environmentally relevant practices are complex and multi-layered; they are part of a wider-ranging way of being-in(and interpreting)-the-world. Their having impacts on the environment is one – if at all – of them. True, some qualitative studies do suggest that sustainable choices flow from values, beliefs and norms. For instance, independent initiatives of ethical consumption may strongly correlate with values of ethical and political responsibility (Slocum 2004; Barendregt and Jaffe 2014). Yet, things change if we address different social groups. Black and Cherrier (2010) examine hermeneutically the interviews of women trying to lead sustainable lives. They show that, while engaging in anti-consumption practices such as rejecting, reusing and recycling (which we would define as "sustainable"), the women's behaviours are more related to self-understandings, identities, core values and need for self-expression than to moral concerns about the environment. Because they do not fit in the category and characterisation of "green consumer" or "ecological citizen", a quantitative top-down approach would obscure their sustainable practices and miss an opportunity for appreciating the different dynamics that may foreground sustainable transitions (see also Hobson 2013a).

Experience-near research also shows the contradictions that official discourses around environmental responsibility incur into as they are *lived*. Hargreaves and colleagues (2010; see also Marres 2009), for instance, show that technological innovations that are institutionally meant to help energy savings do not necessarily meet this objective in practice. They interview people who agreed to have smart meters installed in their households. Interviews suggest that the extra information they provide *does not* necessarily result in behaviour change and improved energy efficiency, as assumed by the information-deficit model. Patterns of household energy use, in fact, are driven by a number of factors that are interactional, context-specific and related to the meanings and values of families – such as leading a 'good life'; *not* by money or emissions concerns. Hence, much of it is perceived as unnegotiable (see also Jolibert et al. 2014). Furthermore, anxiety, guilt and feelings of frustration ensue as people feel charged of the responsibility for changes without having appropriate institutional support.

I would argue, nevertheless, that talking about the influence of "context" on people's "behaviours" leaves in place a certain dichotomy between the two, in the style of a behavioural psychology that is partially at odds with a sociological perspective. This prevents us from conceptualising how the social directly informs, and is part of, actors' inter-meshing with energy-related infrastructures, meanings and gestures. Furthermore, Nye and Hargreaves's (2009) suggestion that behaviour change interventions should involve context-specific accounts with their target sounds like a commitment to refine them rather than challenge their model altogether.

Some researchers (e.g. Callaghan et al. 2012; Souchet and Girandola 2013; Devine-Wright's 2009; Cherry et al. 2015) focus on discourses and "social representations" to overcome this dualism and show how apparently individual actions directly result from socially shared, affectively and politically charged, understandings that become part of social actors' "content of … thinking" (Moscovici 1982: 181).

Fischer et al. (2012), for instance, investigate social representations around the future and climate change in relation to current policy making. Through qualitative open-ended interviews, they seek to get a grasp on people's lived experience of sustainability transitions and governance. In line with above-mentioned studies, they find that the social representations deployed to make sense of household behaviours are often internally contradictory, conflicting with policies and their framing of interventions. Furthermore, envisaged energy futures are not always coherent with hegemonic representations and practices. People do share concern and claim the need for change towards more ecologically-sound societies, especially taking into account future generations. Yet, they are sometimes stuck in inaction not so much by a lack of knowledge, care or concern but rather by confusion and feelings of powerlessness. The complexity of the problem and the incoherence of proposed solutions are often mentioned, showing the existence of stress fields arising from unequal power distribution in implementing change and contradictory social representations regarding climate change solutions.

A more discursive approach is adopted by Capstick et al. (2015). They study the discursive evolution of public understanding around climate change and everyday ethics, showing the collective nature of apparently ‘private’ understandings. They argue that “three scales of change can be distinguished within public understanding of climate change” (747). Although they agree that in the short run public opinion and discourses might be “volatile”; their study emphasises much more continuity and slow but lasting change over time. For instance, they notice, across the span of a few years, a normalisation of discourses that attribute individual responsibility for acting in climate change mitigation: these co-arise with a more generalised uptake of environmentally friendly behaviour such as recycling. There is also stability across time, especially regarding environmental values and ethics (e.g. stewardship of nature; intergenerational justice). These are more culturally entrenched and evolve more slowly. For each of these “paces of change” we see that change in societal discourses “is consequential” in the small-scale but collective uptake of pro-environmental practices (747).

In sum, the qualitative approaches briefly exemplified de-individualise the social subject and the environmentally relevant practices in which s/he engages: behaviours are not simply the result of supposedly interior and ‘held’ beliefs and values, but the complex interplay of social discourses, individual experiences, interactional contexts. These are furthermore understood as the products of political and economic dynamics that shape them according to different interests. Everyday transitions are thus a constant play of competing agendas and people no longer the passive or transparent acceptors of given political projects: they contest and resist them according to their understandings and lived experiences. Nonetheless, the material and infrastructural part of everyday energy uses is still left in the background (Nye and Hargreaves 2009). Moreover, the socio-political level remains somewhat *other* with respect to people’s daily lives, made of individuals and families, recipients of strategies designed ‘from above’. I have also argued that at times this literature sometimes shares rather than challenges policy making’s problematisations and agendas. In the next section, I am going to consider to what extent Social Practice Theory might signal a step towards addressing these issues.

2.3. Social Practices

Studies informed by social practice theory[10] also target the mainstream overly individualistic and simplistic account of social change as based on voluntary choices and behaviours; further, they seek to integrate the downsides of qualitative approaches' exclusive focus on meanings/discourses (Shove and Walker 2010; Hargreaves 2011; Hards 2012; Groves et al. 2016). Authors argue that everyday life is made of a bundle of interconnecting practices. These are accepted ways of *doing and saying* things (Warde 2005; Reckwitz 2002). Practices historically arise and change as a result of complex processes in which technical innovations, social norms and cultural beliefs emerge together – determining for instance certain shared patterns of energy use (Kuijer and Watson 2017). They sediment and are ingrained in bodies, technologies, materials, appliances; become routine and unthought-of habits. People become "carriers of practice" (Shove 2010a: 7; Hargreaves 2011): they enact accepted ways of doing and saying by moving throughout a largely pre-existing material-semiotic infrastructure. Hence, energy use depends on interlocking sociotechnical systems that to a large extent direct courses of action more than on autonomous deliberation.

Social practice investigations on sustainable transitions often refer to consumption since "[m]ost practices, and probably all integrative practices[11], require and entail consumption" (Warde 2005: 137). Furthermore, because the "insatiable appetite for natural resources" is one of the main causes of environmental degradation (Beck 2010: 3, cited in: Shove 2010b), sustainability requires us to understand the dynamics of the escalation of contemporary consumer culture (Shove and Warde 2002). In contrast with much other qualitative research that studies (conspicuous) consumption in terms of identity expression, social comparison, subjective meanings; practice theory emphasises

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[10] A word of caution is due here, as under the umbrella of 'social practice' fall rather diverse theorisations and perspectives (Halkier et al. 2011). In what follows I do not go into the details of these differences, but I focus on how studies inspired by social practice theory enable new understandings of energy use, transitions and everyday life.

[11] Warde uses Schatzki's definition of integrative practice: "complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life" (Schatzki, 1996: 98), involving a number of understandigs, knowledges, doings.

more banal aspects of appropriation, use, appreciation of things and services. These, it is argued, are far more pervasive and environmentally relevant (Hand and Shove 2007). For instance, domestic energy and water uses, "utilities", involve acts of "*in*conspicuous consumption" (Shove and Warde 2002: 1, my emphasis) that nonetheless need to be understood in the interest of energy transitions. One needs asking: how do certain energy use patterns historically come to be part of a 'normal' life; what infrastructural arrangements support them; etc.

Shove (2003) argues, for instance, that in the UK the demand for energy, water and hygienic products linked to bodily cleanliness has been increasing in the last decades as a result of the introduction of new technologies such as electric showers and the development of pipes for water supply. These material developments made bodily cleanliness easier and thus more ordinary. In turn, social standards of hygiene became more stringent – a dynamic escalated by the advertising of cleaning products. Showering, then, is not simply an individual choice, but has to do with our own as well as others' expectations, embodied feelings of being clean versus being dirty, meanings and identities as they are enacted in interactions.

With a greater focus on energy objects, Hand and Shove (2007) study freezer use through qualitative in-depth interviews. The authors notice that freezers have become "normal" in our part of the world: they are owned by most people and used often unquestioningly. This phenomenon is linked to recent developments in systems of food provision, organisation of time, labour patterns, industrial food production, etc. Practices of freezing nonetheless also show strong variation as the rationale for their use is very different across families. Freezers might help preserving gathered food; allow young family members to provide food for themselves even when the parents are at work; be part of efforts to be a 'good mother' in storing self-made food for toddlers. To others, freezers do not fit into actual or desired ways of cooking and eating: concerns for quality, freshness and spontaneity of cooking relegate them to marginal positions. In any case, the freezer, as object, is not simply an *instrument* but an "*orchestrating node*" (95), active in the complex material, symbolic and temporal arrangements of the house: by sheer presence, it can re-configure flows of matter and energy (the mere fact of having a freezer triggers its use out of a concern to not 'waste' it; its affordances of long-term storage promote long-distance travel by car to buy discounted food in big batches). And although ways of using freezers are socially and historically loaded towards one specific function (in the present: time saving), its elasticity prevents socio-cultural framings from becoming a closed determination as use involves iterative appropriation via "assembly and integration" (97).

These examples show that social practice theory is effective in complicating and nuancing our understanding of energy consumption and transitions in everyday life, towards a more holistic view (Hards 2012): the social as made of interlocking discursive and material arrangements and norms; but also the micro-level of individual variation and personal significance (Rinkinen et al. 2015; Hargreaves 2011; Gram-Hanssen 2011). This theory is also non-sectorial and non-reductive: as practices are bundled together, the possibility of changing an unsustainable practice relies on a series of other changes in related practices. Hence, although social practice scholars recognise the creativity and role of individuals in shaping practices, they (albeit to different extents) refuse to attribute them "primary responsibility" for change (Groves et al. 2015: 485). The latter needs to happen at the level of integrated socio-technical systems ranging from the material cultures of provision to social norms and standards (Reckwitz 2002; Marres 2009).

Furthermore, the way in which practices arise and circulate is not neutral: they imply specific effects in terms of social equity and difference. Expensive elite practices, once they become socially valued, have the effect of segregating those who cannot afford them. On the contrary, valuing simple and affordable practices might be emancipatory because many people can be involved in them. Claiming that significant behaviour change requires a thoroughgoing reshaping of relative distribution of power and status (Shove 2010b) thus calls for a change in our social fabric so that unsustainable practices have less power in recruiting social actors. Hence, the social practices approach challenges individualistic policy models because they reproduce unequal power and material distribution while protecting politics from accountability. It is also critical of transition management and propose an effort to produce "new genres and styles of policy" that might be able to imagine and shape different "future ways of life" (Shove 2010a: 1283; 2010b).

Social practice approaches to energy transitions hence address wider power structures, entrenched socio-historical and cultural forms of hierarchy, economic interests, the search for social "distinction" (Bourdieu 1991), etc. as they impinge on, and modify in time, everyday energy practices. What, I believe, goes sometimes amiss in recent applications of this approach is a synthetic view that organically weaves together the level of everyday life practices to wider processes of socio-economic change and stabilisation (admittedly, the last study I mentioned recognises the "normality" of freezing to be emergent from social transformations in labour and consumption, family life, organisation of time, etc.; yet, I believe, this would benefit from a more thorough analysis of the economic and socio-political drivers of such transitions, like the push towards a consumerist society and the increasingly liberalised and often strenuous organisation of labour). This lack in turn prevents a more radical consideration of the largely structural unsustainability of daily life in post-industrial societies (Sayer 2014).

Relatedly, it becomes somehow difficult to conceptualise change and difference: where do they come from? how do they disrupt the apparent stability and homogeneity of practices[12]? how do novel practices arise? Some confusion remains in the literature as to agency and change: are people "recruited" as "carriers of practices"[13] (Warde 2005) or are they creative appropriators (Hand and Shove 2007)? and to what extent is appropriation free, chosen (Bourdieu 1991)? does individual appropriation result in more thoroughgoing *social* change? and how? In the emergence of new socio-technical systems, it is not clear whether technology leads change in norms and values or if all the levels are co-emerging (Geels 2010). These open questions, I believe, result in the inability of social practice literature to bridge the gap between the individual or localised interactional level *and* wider socio-technical systems (see contra: Spaargen and Oosterveer 2010). Either studies describe the historical emergence of societal trends but lose attention to the singularity of lived experience (e.g. Shove 2003 on cleanliness); or they (e.g. Rinkinen et al. 2015; Hand and Shove 2007) concentrate on change at household level without managing to connect this to the macro dimensions of energy use – hence losing critical scope in the effort of recovering experience (Sayer 2014).

This is all the more disappointing, as this level of "lived experience" remains under-theorised and unsatisfyingly addressed. Important questions remain unanswered: why and how do practices become meaningful and important; how are people "recruited" in, and why do they "defect" from, them (Shove 2010b: 283)? And how is this personal level linked to collective ones (Sayer 2014)? The answer is that people engage and persist

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[12] The internal differentiation of practices has been proposed as a corrective to these problems. Systems of practices within which energy consumption happens are always internally differentiated in terms of their meanings, values and competence level (Warde 2005). Individuals interpret and engage in practices depending on the level of skill and pleasure that they draw from the practice itself. Hence, whilst practices are normalised in collective trends, they are also continuously appropriated and kept open by creative human beings who accommodate them to the uniqueness of their life arrangements (Hand and Shove 2007). I believe this framing, nevertheless, leaves unsolved the issues that I am going to raise.

[13] Arguably, this phrase implies an overly passive view of the subject.

in certain practices because of the “interior rewards” that carrying out a certain practice offers. For instance, if I am good at driving fast cars I feel effective in doing it and find the practice pleasurable, so I might find it difficult to give up driving (Warde 2005). “Affective satisfaction” (Hampton 2017: 2) can also be a possible source of sustainable energy transitions: feeling skilful in efficiently managing one’s house and resources through embodied know-how and acquired knowledge might be an important driver of cuts in warmth-related energy expenditure.

But although practice scholars recognise non-rational and non-cognitive dimensions that have to do with identity, everyday relationality, affective and personal significance (Hand and Shove 2007); still the complexly nuanced, often unconscious, intersubjective nature of “rewards” is not addressed. Also, the link between practices and moral-ethical dimensions is poorly considered, so the relationship between energy use and the problem of desire, of what makes a life worth living, remains open (Henwood et al. 2015; Henwood 2018; see also Groves et al. 2016; Thomas et al. 2016). Arguably, this is a missed occasion to bridge that gap I have just mentioned between micro and macro dynamics of change. In fact, as one of social practice theory’s precursors, Pierre Bourdieu (1990), argued: libido is socially channelled in order to maintain order and power. One of the tasks of the sociologist is exactly to map how this happens and unravel how (desiring) visions of the good life are inherently political.

One last point is methodological. Social practice studies rely on an almost hegemonic use of language-based methods. Interpretive understanding of people’s meanings is appreciable as a way of investigating experience and, certainly, people *can* talk about their practices even in very insightful ways (Hitchings 2012; Butler et al. 2014). But for a theory so forcefully interested in how material cultures interact with meanings and doings it is rather strange that there is little effort to engage more deeply with the material qualities of everyday worlds. Largely unacknowledged remain the potentialities of multimodal and embodied methods in the field of home energy use (e.g. Pink and Mackley 2012). Furthermore, social practice studies never address issues of representation, reflexivity and constructedness of research that are common currency in qualitative research (Henwood 2018). The risk is falling into the naïvely realistic belief that one can “reflect real experience” provided that reflexive juxtapositions can make the account “transparent” (Hards 2012: 761, 767).

2.4. Psychosocial contributions

The challenge of studying the everyday in its affective/desiring dimensions has been taken up by what is called the 'psychosocial' approach, also committed to problematising behaviour-change policies and their 'anthropological' implications. Drawing on different traditions such as critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, psychosocial studies look at subjective experience in depth. They also build a non-reductive view of the inextricable relationship between individual and society by critiquing deeply ingrained Western constructions of the subject as an atomised, autonomous and rational individual (Taylor and McAvoy 2015). Subjectivity forms relationally, so that social discourses become constitutive parts (although in irreducible ways) of what we perceive as our identity; it is also ridden with unconscious dynamics, desires, affects and psychic investments and as such irreducible to rationality (Lertzman 2013).

2.4.1. Psychoanalysis and the environment

In the landscape of psychosocial studies, psychoanalytically oriented research – variously informed by Freud, object-relations, Melanie Klein and others – has tackled in most depth environmental issues. Psychoanalysis is believed to positively contribute to the study of mental processes and lived affective experience. It also has the political commitment to think in terms of *social*, not simply individual responsibilities for environmental justice. This involves a complete recasting of collective attitudes towards nature, a challenge to the instrumental Western "background philosophy" that posits the world as something 'there' for us to exploit (Weintrobe 2013a: 5). Yet, there is also the tacit assumption that each individual needs to take responsibility for pro-environmental change. The complex and non-transparent psychic struggles that are involved in such process have become the focus of interest for scholars in this area (Randall 2009).

One of the main themes addressed is the anxiety that global and apparently uncontrollable environmental issues generate. Climate change provokes anxiety because it is "too much" to cope with: it confronts people with the threat of life annihilation and the loss of much-cherished unsustainable lifestyles and practices (Weintrobe 2013b; Randall 2009). Also, it subjects them to the shock of infinite debt towards mother earth, all the more unbearable as there is no one to give forgiveness to senses of guilt (Randall 2013). Drawing on Klein's psychoanalytic concepts, Weintrobe (2013b: 34) proposes that, to guard against anxiety, people often adopt a "paranoid-schizoid position". They split psychic contents, holding awareness of environmental damage and at the same time believing the problem to be ‘out there’, unrelated to their own actions or experience (Randall 2009). Splitting is often accompanied by the projection of responsibility for change onto other subjects, such as governments or industry. Another common response is disavowal, the rejection of the existence of climate change. Denial, instead, is produced by the feeling of being, as humans, all-powerful: a belief in magical quick-fixes, often relying on technological innovations, that allow us to deny the seriousness of the situation and postpone action to the future.

Weintrobe (2013b) sees these responses as deeply interconnected to the current culture of denial. Psychological reactions to climate change are not ‘individual’, but part of collective ways of framing the problem: “perverse” social structures that systemically split, obscure and deny the unpleasant undersides of current unequal and exploitative systems (Hoggett 2010; 2013). It is foremost a socio-cultural problem, then, if individuals are not able to utilise the reality-oriented part of their psyche and adopt what Klein would call a “depressive position” (Weintrobe 2013b): the depressive subject overcomes anxiety through a process of mourning that allows, on the one hand, to face the reality of climate change and, on the other, to recognise the steps that can significantly be made to mitigate and cope with it.

Lertzman (2013; 2015) adds to the psychosocial theorisation of environmental inaction by developing the concept of “environmental melancholia”. She studies the experiences of people living in a specific geographical area[14], the ecology of which is deeply damaged but where no widespread pro-environmental action is taken. Critical of simplistic policy models that treat subjects as both unitary and compartmentalised rational individuals, Lertzman adopts a psychoanalytically informed interview strategy for in-depth qualitative investigations, relying on relationality, free association and open-ended questions in the data-gathering phase. Analysis draws on Bollas’s object-relations theory and in particular on his conceptualisation of “the nonhuman object world as reflections of our unconscious lives, similar to dreams” (Lertzman 2015: 75).

The picture that arises challenges the widely held “myth of apathy”, which suggest that people do not care enough about the environment to do anything about it. But it is

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[14] This is Green Bay, Winsconsin – one of the communities that face the Great Lakes. It has been an important site of industrial development, specialised in paper pulp production, since the 1850s. The uncaring and mindless industrial use of resources and sink-capacity of the local ecosystems has made this area very sensitive for environmental degradation, with local environmental groups trying to invert this trend in the last decades.

not always a matter of anxiety either. Often people do recognise and accept the problem of environmental degradation, but it is precisely this recognition to make them unable to act. There is, in fact, a shared sense of grief for the perceived loss of important things, such as regular seasons, fertile land, pure water, etc. This resembles the one experienced upon losing a dear person. Yet, people are not able to articulate clearly *what* the lost object is. Hence, the process of mourning that normally sets in after a bereavement, in which grief is elaborated and ultimately overcome, is severed. This gives space to a more generalised state of melancholia. With its affinities to depression, melancholia makes people passive, unable to act – thus the perceived apathy. Ambivalent positioning with respect to the financial rewards of industrial development is also one of the reasons of inaction, as environmental loss is also perceived as the necessary side-effect of affluence.

The distance between psychoanalytic perspectives and those informing mainstream policy-making is evident. As subjectivity becomes the ambivalent and conflictual realm of conscious and unconscious dynamics, simplistic accounts of inaction as due to 'gaps' between attitudes and behaviours, or in information, are challenged (Lertzman 2013; 2015). Appealing to rationality cannot be an effective way of changing behaviours, because it forgets the deep-seated and "primeval" anxiety that lies at the basis of our human existence (Rustin 2013: 105). Indeed, overwhelming information might even exacerbate defensive reactions. Climate change mitigation and pro-environmental behaviour change need supportive and nuanced policies; safe spaces for elaborating psychic conflicts; new stories to be told about the good life and futures beyond carbon. In this way, it will be possible to restore a sense of reality: of what the problem is and the concrete steps to solve it are – a new subjectivity, more aware of its limits and of the hierarchy in which it is situated, to find back hope in the future (Randall 2009; Randall 2013).

Distancing themselves from the contemporary tendency of placing responsibility (and blame) for environmental degradation on individuals' consumption choices, there is a commendable effort to try and link individuals' troubles with wider systemic dynamics. Yet, this is not always done successfully: conflicts, fantasies, investments, etc. too easily slip to the level of an individualised unconscious and the social, cultural and environmental sphere tend to disappear (Lertzman 2013; Adams forthcoming). This over-focus on the psychic domain may endanger pro-environmental change, failing to build that opening to planetary problems which ecological threats require (Adams 2016). Too close attention to individual biographies might also be problematic because of little interest for policy, as it is unfeasible on wider scale (Bichard 2013).

Hoggett (2013), indeed, proposes that psychosocial research should be more attentive to the social structures in which individuals are embedded. The problem with this view, though, is that by recovering social structures, it has lost the singularity of experience and the individual is flattened onto the social (Cohen 2013). Hence, Hoggett's hope that a confident and authoritative State will be able to mitigate climate change by organising bottom-up initiatives is somewhat wishful if not altogether misguided. First, it arbitrarily implies that structures are somehow identifiable with the State – the same State that others identify as ineffective with regards to pro-environmental change (e.g. Randall 2009). Most importantly, by conceptualising structures as abstract entities with lives on their own, Hoggett loses the opportunity to better consider the capacity of concrete and local powers to change states of things.

More interesting is Lertzman's proposal (2013) to re-consider Guattari's (2000) *The Three Ecologies* – an approach where nature, society and individual are conceptualised as interdependent entities that cannot be separated, not even methodologically and for heuristic reasons. Problems at one level correspond to dysfunctions on another: it is not possible nor desirable to act for change at individual level without simultaneously addressing the social and natural one. Hence, more inter-disciplinary dialogue is needed to grasp the different levels of ecological issues.

Another weak point of psychoanalytically informed perspectives is their overwhelming attention to language (Froggett and Hollway 2010; Adams 2016)[15]. As even affects and emotions come to be understood according to a logic of signification, we lose focus on the materiality of embodiment and ecological experience (Blackman and Venn 2010). In looking to develop new cultural *narratives*, psychosocial researchers forget a central issue: that these narratives are "anchored" in the "material structure of everyday life", made of phenomenal, spatial and material aspects (Adams forthcoming). This also results in a problematic contradiction. Psychoanalytically-oriented scholars understand people's worlds as imaginary, ridden with fantasies and psychic defences. For this reason, they believe the "heightened rationality" of the scientist is ineffective for spurring behaviour change (Randall 2009). *And yet*, they trust psychoanalysis to help "bring … 'psychic reality' into alignment with the real world" (Rapley 2013: xx). Hence,

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[15] This is in line with the hermeneutic tendencies of psychoanalytic practice, where patients' talk tends to be interpreted as a stock of symbols that refer to the unconscious as deeper (still symbolic) psychic reality.

the desired end-point of their interventions is precisely to lead people to "adulthood": the enlightened path of rational understanding of world issues *as they are*, avoiding the risk of the "descent into unreason" of paranoid-schizoid positions (Randall 2013: 115).

The problem is that what "the real world" is and how we know it – these questions are never posed. Psychosocial researchers do not engage with questions regarding systems of "power/knowledge": by whom and in the interest of whom a certain problem and its proposed solutions are produced (Foucault 1980); scientific claims to knowledge and researchers' *own* investments and positionalities are never critically evaluated. Hence, their call for a reinstated "reality principle" normalises given reality as coherent and meaningful (Frosh and Baraitser 2008) and in so doing risks, despite the good intentions, to become the umpteenth, unwilling, instrument of governmentality[16]. This is even truer as appeal to psychoanalysis generates a position of expert knowledge for the psychoanalyst-researcher through the claim to be able to know/access the "truth" of individuals' psyches and the techniques to align them to (socially accepted) reality (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2000). It is also depoliticising: accounts of lack of pro-environmental behaviour as "anxious", "defended", in "pain" and "grief" tend to pathologise and psychologise symptoms that may have very social and power-ridden roots that remain unacknowledged. For instance, why should we consider feelings of impotence as psychic defences and not the correlative of social inequalities in power distribution? Finally, by emphasising the *limits* and not the productivity of life and desire, psychosocial researchers remain aligned to the same culture of death that they criticise, missing out on desire's power to produce change (Grosz 2010; Dal Gobbo 2017)[17].

As a response to these challenges, Froggett and Hollway (2010) have introduced the practice of *scenic understanding*. Biographically specific elements are drawn together with societal and collective unconscious processes as well as with forms of materially embedded cultural life. Their commitment to move beyond the "unitary dogma" of Kleinian and objects-relation psychoanalysis opens an interesting window of opportunity for psychosocial studies to re-engage with their own critical political endeavour and diverse sources of inspiration (Frosh and Baraitser 2008). In line with this, in the next

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[16] Deleuze and Guattari 2000 themselves voiced a powerful critique of the ways in which psychoanalysis has historically performed such a normalising function.

[17] This is not to say that pro-environmental behaviour change needs to be communicated with uncritical optimism as desirable and easy, as Ward (2013) suggests. The point is to go beyond a positive/negative distinction as defined by current values and imagining altogether new modes of being (in) nature. The extent to which also the affirmation of positivity and productivity of Life might be politically dangerous will be expanded upon in §4.

section I argue that less explicitly psychoanalytic, but still psychosocial, views might be a more convincing way to approach environmentally-significant practices.

2.4.2. The Energy Biographies *project. Energy and affects: how to make the invisible visible.*

In this section I would like to concentrate on a project that bears much relevance to my own research interests: *Energy Biographies* (http://energybiographies.org). A longitudinal, multimedia, qualitative study interested in how life-course transitions complexly involve changes in everyday energy use (Groves et al. 2015; for more details on the design see Shirani et al. 2016)[18]. Critical of mainstream policy-making models described above, the study engages with the achievements of social practice theory but it seeks to address some of its limitations by psychosocially addressing everyday lived experience in terms of affects, investments and the ways they interact with wider socio-historical transitions. Yet, the group of researchers prefers to approach biographies and narratives of change through interpretive rather psychoanalytic lenses (Henwood 2018; see also Finn and Henwood 2009; Butler et al. 2014; Groves et al. 2015; Groves et al. 2016).

Based on the data gathered, the authors critically position themselves with respect to policy discourses that construct lifecourse transitions as ‘opportunities’ for re-modelling people’s energy practices in more sustainable ways. Using a narrative approach allows them to see that transitions are not lived by people as linear progressive trajectories, nor as clear-cut open-ended moments in which it is possible to straightforwardly reshuffle energy use towards sustainability. Groves et al. (2015) notice that biographical transitions can generate identity conflicts, fragility, anxiety. Practices are one of the means by which people build and maintain their identities, generating a secure space in which to enact personal identity (Groves et al. 2015; see also 2016). Patterns of more or less sustainable energy use involved in the embodied activities and cycles of family care (e.g. over-heating the house but also knitting and recycling), might be re-enacted across transitions as a way of maintaining self-identity. Similarly, wasteful practices like heating the outdoors through patio heaters may even be newly established after a relocation, as a way of establishing continuities with lives lived elsewhere. Thus

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[18] This is particularly relevant to my study, which addresses the economic recession as both a social and biographical transition – since its effects are felt and lived at the micro-level of the everyday.

people may cling to, disavow or even value certain practices even if aware of their unsustainability.

The *relational* nature of everyday energy practices becomes evident. Not only habits and affordances of different objects and materials, but also biographical intersubjective connections contribute to constituting attachments and investments in certain ways of using energy: meanings and valued identities arise as social discourses, norms and standards are lived in the encounters with significant others (Groves et al. 2016). In this, biographies are individual; but they also arise as part of social and historical trajectories. Some of these favour and others obstruct change towards more sustainable energy practices (Shirani et al. 2015). In the last decades, for instance, social narratives of being 'green' have changed and become more mainstream, impacting on individuals' capacities to enact positive pro-environmental practices: as green lifestyles are becoming increasingly 'normal', "being an environmentalist" is experienced in a less conflictual way than in the past when such an identity was looked at with suspicion (though this does not necessarily entail a change in practices).

Conflicts also arise as a result of contradictory narratives co-existing in the present (Henwood et al. 2015). One case is intergenerational conflict. As discourses of sustainable energy use become mainstream for young people in times of austerity and visibility of climate change, they clash with the affective and moral dimension of energy practices established in the past. For instance, younger generations might find inappropriate to fill freezers with much food that is likely to go wasted; yet, older people might cherish this practice as a reaction to the historical conditions of food insecurity of their childhood (Groves et al. 2016). Identity conflicts exist also between contemporary but diverging constructions of 'being green', lived by people as part of their own life-building practices. People who make unconventional choices out of sustainability concerns, like going to live in eco-villages, need to negotiate their identities with respect to more mainstream ways of 'being green'. They feel that wider society has prejudices against their life choices, which they feel are mistakenly constructed as frugal, lacking comfort, deprived, communal. Aligning to a green identity or lifestyle brings positive self-understandings as innovative forward thinkers; at the same time, this choice implies the threat of social exclusion, dealt with by downplaying ideological differences with respect to mainstream society (Shirani et al. 2015).

But the study also shows that personal life changes can be less disruptive and anxiety-provoking if embedded in a wider collective, versus individualised, narrative frame (see Groves et al. 2015). For instance, relocating to an ecovillage involves the process of building the house, setting up off-grid energy provision and establishing links with the communities outside of the village. In this, a number of compromises need to be accepted, like the use of plastic in construction or of the car for moving. These can be threats to ‘green identities’. Nonetheless, ecovillages are a collective endeavour that connect personal transitions with similar ones; they provide the narratives to recognise, verbalise, acknowledge and ultimately accept conflicts. This facilitates novel meaning-making and gives the opportunity to envisage positive future perspectives. Something similar should also be true for wider society: in a context where transitions towards sustainable lifestyles are ambivalently framed, especially if too radical, opportunities for “encounter spaces” where different narratives of change and sustainable practices can meet might facilitate the creation of a shared repertoire for making sense of, and enacting, energy transitions.

Another insightful concept introduced is “texturing” (Thomas et al. 2016). Texturing is understood as the process whereby subjects become emotionally attached to certain ways of carrying out practices through processes of meaning making and embodied knowledge. The way people define certain practices as more or less wasteful, for instance, is the result of past and present engagement with local flows of material, activities, shared social practices of conceptualising, doing and treating ‘waste’, to which affects are attached. Experiencing commitment to energy saving as child in a poor family, say, may lead to a texturing of leaving lights on when unneeded as “wasteful” even when money is no longer an issue. As switching off lights becomes a socially valued practice for sustainability reasons, this habitual gesture can encounter novel slogans and normative expectations. As such, energy saving is positively experienced because an embodied and identity-relevant practice of frugality finds again a significant place within the household. On the other side, past attachments to warmth in the house as vehicle for family intimacy and relationality might imply that today a very warm house is not textured as wasteful despite awareness of its (environmental) costs.

Beyond the social practice view that “recruitment” in practices comes from rewards that depend on doing a practice ‘right’, we need to consider how personal identity, history, inter-subjective relationality are shaped and always re-constituted through various uses of energy – and these are seldom in line with normative or institutional accounts of waste. Hence, instead of imposing top-down agendas, “approaches to waste reduction and pro-environmental behaviour should look to the tangible interdependencies through which subjects experience and designate waste in practice” (Thomas et al. 2016: 4; see also Groves et al. 2015; 2016). *Energy Biographies* shows the importance of linking individual biographies to wider socio-historical trajectories that impinge on the degree of agency that social actors have in changing their own energy behaviours, avoiding the risk of individualising and psychologising engagement in environmentally relevant practices (Groves et al. 2016). Studying biographies as temporally and spatially embedded shows that personal narratives are relevant to a collective understanding of the present and the opportunities it gives (or forecloses) for sustainable transitions (see also Henwood and Pidgeon 2016).

Finally, *Energy Biographies* develops an innovative method, comprising interviewing techniques and use of multimedia, to tap the invisibility of energy and energy futures, the complexity of everyday life and the multiple planes (symbolic, material, affective) on which lived experience articulates (see esp. Shirani et al. 2016). They ask people to take photographs portraying different moments of their lives such as leisure activities, mobility, work, use of energy – to be later discussed in interviews. This photo-elicitation activity helps people speak about energy practices that would otherwise pass unnoticed, be seen as irrelevant or difficult to articulate. It also helps to concentrate attention on the relationality between people and energy objects as integral part of daily routines, sometimes making participants more aware of the recurrent and pervasive presence of energy in their everyday. Multimedia also allows access to another invisible dimension of the everyday, *time*. For instance, photos shot at different moments evidence lifecourse change; videos with different energy scenarios serve as anchoring points for articulating future ecological imaginaries.

Overall, *Energy Biographies* is a commendable advance in the study of everyday energy transitions because it addresses both the shortcomings of institutionalised policy making and of social practice theory by bringing back the affective, emotional and embodied nature of energy use as part of temporally and spatially embedded lived experience. With my study, I aim to build on these achievements, perhaps stretching them to areas of investigations that they already imply. Something worth addressing further is the link between individual biographies and wider socio-economic, cultural and political processes – which in the case of *Energy Biographies* lacks an explicitly critical perspective on the power-ridden nature of the social field and its political economy. In this context, attention to *desire* and the ways it is shaped by, but also resists, hegemonic "libidinal economies" (see Freud 2015: 143) looks promising (Henwood 2018). Finally, by taking a more ethnographic approach, I seek to investigate the affordances of embodied involvement in the field for studying affect, materiality, discourse (Forde 2017).

Chapter three

Interlude: The everyday

Before considering the theoretical framework used to address these research aims, I would like to be more specific about what I mean by 'the everyday' and 'everyday life'[19]. In doing this, I refer to the theorists who most openly and fruitfully engaged with this topic, as well as with contemporary sociology, to build a working sketch, a vision, of the everyday as it guided both my data production and analysis. Among the 'classics'[20], one cannot forget Henri Lefebvre with his seminal *Critique of Everyday Life* (2014), Michel De Certeau (2012) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990)[21].

Despite their differences, most theorists of everyday life recognise, as a central feature, the difficulty of definition. By its own nature undefined, partially invisible, at the edges of institutional meaning-making practices, everyday life has been mostly defined in negative terms, as what it is *not*. As a field of enquiry, for example, it does not include the "higher" spheres that normally interest sociology: paid work, the public sphere, art and culture, formal education, political processes, institutions, markets, etc. (Lefebvre 2014; Highmore 2002; Hall et al. 2008). As Lefebvre (2014) had it, the everyday is a "residual" space where the necessities of life are met so that those higher functions can

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[19] Although these are somewhat different, for the purposes of the present discussion they will be considered as interchangeable.

[20] The list of course does not end here. Ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism, for instance, have took "everyday life" as a primary concern of study (see most notably, Goffman 1990) and they would deserve an altogether separate treatment. Throughout this chapter, nonetheless, I engage with those that have most centrally contributed to the development of my research.

[21] There is unfortunately no space here for a thorough consideration of the differences among the three, but the reader should be advised that they are, at points, profound. One of them is political: although, to a certain extent, all three have criticised some features of modern capitalist societies, it should be clear that only Lefebvre defined himself Marxist – albeit not an orthodox one. His critique is therefore to be situated in a Marxist method-politics of emancipation that is not necessarily the aim of the other two. Hence, terms like "resistance", "domination", "power" and so on, as they will be employed below, have different significance for each theorist. For instance, while both De Certeau and Lefebvre notice that everyday life implies resistance to hegemonic power formations, the former tends to describe it as a contextual effort of 'getting by' while for the latter it is part of a wider dialectical movement of social change. Analytical and critical emphases are also not homogeneous – for instance, Bourdieu is more attentive to the normative dimensions of "habitus" and De Certeau to inventive practices.

emerge. It comprises all the reproductive activities that are part of people's 'getting by' – cooking, moving around, sleeping, playing, entertaining social and intimate relations, shopping. But their banality and marginality should not deceive us: everyday practices are importantly, if indirectly, implicated in and traversed by "higher" societal arrangements and categories: a place where micro and macro levels of social organisation encounter (Lefebvre 2014). If conceptualised as the "humble and sordid side of life" (Lefebvre 2014: 313), everyday life can easily appear a perhaps boring realm of habit and repetition, rehearsal of little practices and knowledge – the site of an unthought-of habitus where we forgetfully, unquestioningly, reproduce the gestures and meanings acquired through socialisation (Bourdieu 1990; see also Butler et al. 2014; Neal and Murij 2015).

Yet, daily life is also enacted at the level of *concrete* being; practices are emplaced and inhabited by irreducible bodies, traditions and imaginings (Hannigan 2002). This implies that repetition is never mechanical iteration: it acquires a rhythmic quality[22] (Adam 1997). And "[r]hythmicity … implies not just repetition but differences within repetition", "itineration" (Ingold 2010b: 98; see also Chow 2010; Deleuze 1997)[23]. Practical, phenomenal and sensual dynamism is opposite to 'structure', inherently subversive of socially-sanctioned categories (see esp. De Certeau 2012; Neal and Murij 2015). The creative potency of life always lets the unexpected emerge from predictable everyday scripts, reserving moments of profundity, beauty and enchantment. The arts of "doing-making" (Maffesoli 2012: x) and the inventive appropriation of 'higher' social processes open spaces of creation and difference that are fluidly, and actively, immersed in history[24]. This is the ambiguity of the everyday: acceptance and simultaneous rejection of states of things; 'good conduct' and continuous engagement in pervasive "counter-conducts" (Foucault 2007: 193; see also De Certeau 2012).

This also bears some hope for emancipatory change in as far as sustainability is concerned (Hagbert and Bradley 2017). The capitalist reduction of the world to an ensemble of abstract, exchangeable, equivalents (exchange-values) is in fact central to its destructive appropriation of the earth. Against this, the sensuous and care-oriented nature

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[22] Significantly, one of the critical methods Lefebvre (2004) devised was precisely "rhythmanalysis": a mode of attuning to the diffused and silent subversion of everyday practices (De Certeau 2012).

[23] The 'elective affinities' between Lefebvre and Deleuze with regards to "difference and repetition" are identified by Ingold (2010b).

[24] Indeed, especially since the 1960s-70s contestations that put precisely the sphere of reproduction to the forefront of political concerns, everyday practices of certain women and men have been well in advance compared to institutional and/or corporate change (Segal 1989; 2010; Leonardi 2018).

of everyday life can reconnect with the singularity and therefore non-disposability of each experience, object, thing, moment and with non-human nature at large. Recognising that increasing material and economic production are not a source of flourishing for a 'good (everyday) life' might build willing transitions towards less consumerist and more ecologically sound relationships with the planet (Leonardi 2018; Salleh 2017; Illich 1973). At this level, "incremental processes of civil resistance" (Hall 2015) (e.g. subtraction from, and creative appropriation of, currently unsustainable energy and matter flows) might build and make durable a wider collective change, giving hope to many willing to resist the environmentally destructive practices of the global economy (Edwards 2010; Gabb and Fink 2015).

These considerations open the space for more strictly methodological points. The everyday calls for a science that can grasp the social across its different constitutive levels, as a totality (Lefebvre 2014). The main point is being able to look at the micro-level of social organisation with "sociological attentiveness" (Back 2015: 834) to see how "the singularity of the everyday event … reverberates with social and psychic desire as well as with the structures of national and global exchange" (Lefebvre 1991: 57; see also 2014; Highmore 2002). This affirmation brings both socio-political *and* psychic issues to the forefront, suggesting the relevance of a psychosocial approach: everyday life is continuously traversed by embodied and affective streams, but desires are in turn inextricably historical, cultural, social and economic (Lefebvre 2014).

The concrete, embodied nature of the everyday also calls for methods that are both inventive and attentive to its material, a-symbolic and elusive aspects, *beyond* either the scientific interest in matter alone or the philosophical emphasis on thoughts and ideas: able to 'sense' their interdependence – itself a sort of everyday life (Back 2015; Ingold 2007; 2008; Deleuze 2010a). This needs empirical engagement with concrete daily existence, a creative and attentive attitude to generative processes, to society as *alive* (Lefebvre 2014; De Certeau 2012). The unsettledness of the everyday, its awkward evasiveness, call for method and rigour and simultaneously modes of study and representation irreducible to the standards of a 'scientific' method that reduces it to static categories that fail to grasp its complexly textured and dynamic character (Highmore 2002; Hall et al. 2008). And if this is something the social sciences seem to partially struggle with[25], qualitative research can be turned sensitive to daily life's peculiar modes

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[25] Possibly, this is due to their traditional commitment to make reality ordered and intelligible (or to understand how it is made to appear as such). Yet, the everyday is

of *poiesis* and, indeed, poetics: it is capable to address multi-layered and experience-near meanings; open to experimentation and inventive contingent appropriation of methods that are "fit for purpose", attuned to the "dynamic, sensory, multiple and multi-dimensional nature of micro-life" (Neal and Murij 2015: 816); committed to reflexive practice and representation that respect complexity and openness.

The everyday also seems to call for methods that are at once critical and immanent. Lefebvre (2014: 321), as a Marxist, conceptualises reality dialectically and sees the everyday as a 'negative' to capitalist organisation, whose resistances are often incorporated and accommodated by hegemonic structures. Research is for him a force among many inhabiting the social, which can contribute to unleash subversive potentials by articulating its contradictions. Representation is not solely 'description': it involves the making-visible of invisible forces with the intent of bringing them to political expression. Similarly, critical theorist Walter Benjamin and Mass Observation[26] studies seek to unleash hidden potentialities in the tensions of this complex field. For them, though, this is not a matter of scientifically analysing a field of contrasting forces but an almost aesthetic endeavour[27]: altering the experience of everydayness; gearing it towards the strange, the unexpected, the unruly. Literary montages made of explosive juxtapositions and productive assemblages, for instance, can shock the reader by showing the magic and enchantment of daily life, but also its unassimilable elements, leading to new visions and connections (Highmore 2002; Seremetakis 1993).

Representing without reifying the everyday certainly remains one of the most problematic issues in this field. And although literary montage has not appealed to many scholars in the field[28], attentiveness to creative, inventive and sensuous empirical methods remains a central feature of the sociology of everyday life. Recently, multisensory, multimodal and multimedia ethnographies have been shown to bear great potential for

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starting to become an important field of enquiry: see, for instance, the special issue in *Sociology*, 49(5).

[26] This was a collective of researchers who, in the early decades of the 1900s, started a longitudinal project of data collection about everyday life across the British population with the aim of both critiquing and emancipating everyday life (see Hurdley 2014).

[27] Notably, Mass Observation largely used psychoanalysis as a way to evidence contradictions as symptoms of repressed social forces, thereby making them political matters. Its methods were day surveys and "surrealist ethnography" in houses as a means of living and experiencing *with* participants (Highmore 2002: 95; Hurdley 2014).

[28] Arguably, montage leaves open the question of the positioning of the social scientist in the montage itself: what is his/her role as assembler and the preferred readings that a certain montage inspires? what its effects? Furthermore, one needs considering how much a sense of montage and cacophony should give way to order and intelligibility, as sociology seeks to communicate to its readers (Highmore 2002).

investigating “everyday aesthetics” (Highmore 2002: 19). In chapter 5 I will expand on how I have put these insights in practice.

3.1. The case for thinking the crisis as a space of everyday transition towards sustainability

It is in war, famine, and epidemic that werewolves and vampires proliferate.
(Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 243)

Once one accepts that one of the main issues with unsustainable daily practices is capitalist (post-)industrial organisation, one of the points to address is to what extent we can envisage a movement of resistance against it. In historical times of crisis, generalised uncertainty and disillusionment with traditional Marxist perspectives such as the 1980s, Lefebvre (2014) looked at everyday life as a fruitful space of emancipation by turning from hope in the revolution to the project of “*changer la vie*” (Trebitsch 2014: 674). The everyday was to him a potential space of resistance to economic agendas of growth and accumulation because it could claim the need for *qualitative* and not merely quantitative change[29]. Similarly, Mass Observation studies suggested that periods of social crisis could boost oppositional movements, as gaps between official representations and lived lives become apparent. As social, economic and ecologic precariousness are becoming an entrenched feature of our daily experience, the question is whether they might spur profound social and political transformation.

In theory, there is a case for crises to be regarded as moments of creativity and change, especially at the micro level of the everyday (see Bourdieu 2009: 58; but also Illich 1973). As Turner (1974: 75) argues, they act like “margins” where “the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun … instant[s] of pure potentiality”. These “liminal” or “liminoid” moments can be seedbeds of cultural and social, but also material, experimentation (Jessop and Oosterlynk 2008;

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[29] It is interesting to notice that the project of *changer la vie* as a movement away from the ruling dogmas of economic growth in favour of qualitative search for the ‘good life’ resonates with the arguments proposed by environmental critics and advocates of post-growth and steady-state economy – even not Marxist (e.g. Jackson 2009; Barry 2008; for an eco-socialist perspective see Gorz 1980; Leonardi 2018). But Lefebvre (2014) also argued that this potentiality was not unequivocal, since its demands could eventually be integrated within the capitalist economy.

Stenner 2017) that can spill out to reconfigure social dispositives: demarcations of what is and can be enunciated, forms of visibility, power dynamics and modes of subjectification (Deleuze 2010b).

How much it is the case, in practice, that the economic crisis has been an opportunity for a change towards sustainability, though, is debated. Brown (2015; see also Harris 2013; Tienhaara 2014; Schor 2014) thinks the opposite happened: restoring the economy has become the social and political imperative and ecological measures have been declining both at institutional and corporate level[30]. Simultaneously, neoliberalism has naturalised its crisis tendencies and warded off its critics by deploying scientific imaginaries of nature as unstable and far from equilibrium (Pellizzoni 2011). The perceived irreversibility of ecological damage has undermined radical hopes; everyday precariousness closes off utopias and horizons of future change as people tend to be concerned with getting by in the present. Even when the framing of the crisis as opportunity for economic recovery and relaunch *has* been accepted, there has been no agreement on concrete action – not even among social movements – and a shared environmental politics not been implemented (Tienhaara 2014; Smith 2011).

Taking a global perspective, nevertheless, the landscape changes quite radically. With a number of examples from the global South, Alier (2009) and Schneider et al. (2010), but also Schor (2014) from the US, argue that the economic crisis *can* be an opportunity because it constitutes a good space of convergence for different civil society subjects unsatisfied with the current system and concerned with environmental, economic and social justice: an environmentalism primarily in the interests *of the poor*. This is based on de-growth projects emphasizing real-real economy as concrete engagement with natural needs and resources; change at the level of everyday practices through *collective* initiatives like local and sustainable food sourcing, sharing intiatives, cooperatives and alternative forms of funding.

These movements are promising but, for now, limited in scope. One of the tasks of a critical environmental sociology is to go into the field and investigate this space of transition, its lines of sedimentation and change. Having described some of the reasons why the everyday is an important space for ecology, and having identified some of its

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[30] It should be noticed nonetheless that Brown (2015: 13) himself recognises that 'sustainability' continues to embody the other of the present system, the unsignifiable excess of something that is "impossible to say": the spectre of the impossibility of what defines capitalism itself – growth and accumulation. Therefore, ecology does continue to embody radical, if inactive, potentials (see also Fisher 2009).

sociological features, it is now time to turn to the design of my study and its theoretical underpinnings.

Chapter four
A few points on theory

It is often said that arrival of the Anthropocene era calls for thinking in deep geological time. But here it is argued that it will call for thinking in deep affective time, because at its most fundamental level, the Anthropocene is driven by embodied libidinal energies ... A critical ecotheory needs to articulate flows – between ideas and feelings, ecosystems and bodies, free of conventional strictures like mind over body, subject over object, Humanity over Nature. Without understanding the biophysical pulses that energise humans as material beings, there is no remedy for the international problems that contemporary communities and governments are facing.

(Salleh 2016: 423)

In this chapter I pause to clarify some theoretical points[31], on which I dwell a little more than normal for three main reasons. The first is that Deleuzian thought, which inspired my research, has been taken up only scantily in empirical research and therefore needs to be dealt with more explicitly (notable exceptions are: Fuglsang and Sorensen 2006; Coleman and Ringrose 2013; the special issue of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 2013, 26(6); Bennett 2005). Secondly, as involving both an onto-epistemological perspective (i.e. a way of conceptualising ‘reality’ and knowledge claims about it) and a view on contemporary social processes, it intervenes both in the form and content of my analyses (accompanied, to be sure, by other alive and dead, white and black, men and women…). Hence, the need I feel to clarify how I put this philosophy to work. Finally, flat ontologies, immanent and process philosophies are

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[31] It should be clear that the aim is not to make ‘theory’ stand above the interpretation of data or, worse, force one. Theory in social research should, on the contrary, help cultivating plural epistemologies, opening the field, the data and the researcher to unexpected visions, which in turn never claim to be definite and exhaustive (Davies et al. 2013). Contrary to the claim that an ‘objective’ social science can exist at all, it has long been recognised that social research is always informed by more or less explicit philosophical paradigms (Lather 1986). Hence, claiming the primacy of a supposedly a-theoretical research technique amounts to the dogmatic claim of direct and unmediated access to the social world (e.g. De Certeau 2012; Jackson and Mazzei 2012; Blühdorn 2007; Foster 2012; Lather 2013). Spelling out the philosophical presuppositions of one’s research is then, first and foremost, a matter of intellectual honesty and, secondly, of opening productive possibilities for different interpretations (Martin and Kamberelis 2013).

becoming of interest to environmentally-concerned social theory (Meyer and Kersten 2016). Actor-Network-Theory (see, e.g. Latour 2005) and Feminist New Materialisms (e.g. Haraway 1991; Bennett 2004; Braidotti 2006a; Coole and Frost 2010; Cheah 2010) are among the most notable. These "post-constructionist" theories (Pellizzoni 2014a: 857) claim a Deleuzian legacy (despite departing from it at times significantly: Thrift 2000; Ingold 2010b; 2011) but I do not identify my work as part of any of these streams; hence, it is all the more appropriate to draw lines of overlap and differentiation. What follows is not a systematic or philological review but a weaving of some theoretical lines that are relevant to the issues raised in the two preceding chapters.

4.1. Immanence and the potency of matter – challenging anthropocentrism

One of the main points argued above is that everyday energy practices and transitions need to be treated as complex issues, the study of which cannot be reduced to one level of reality or another: they emerge in complex entanglements of people, objects, discourses, institutions, technology… without any of them taking explanatory priority (Geels 2010; Comacho 2008). Deleuzian thought can help in this, since it is a thought of/on complexity, challenging modernity's tendencies to categorise the world and obscure the totality of life in process (Lefebvre 2014; Ingold 2010a; 2010b; 2011). Particularly relevant is the critique of Western metaphysics of transcendence: the assumption that the 'principles' of life are not *in* the concrete world of experience – but somehow *above* or at any rate separate from it. For instance, God gives life and form/order to matter[32]. Such metaphysics foregrounds hierarchical dualisms – of which matter|spirit, body|mind, humanity|nature are the most relevant to our discussion – in which the former terms are identified as 'superior' to the latter: "major" vs "minor", in Deleuzian-Guattarian (2014: 106-107 esp.) parlance. It is also at the basis of the assumption that human beings can dispose of nature as lifeless 'thing' to manipulate and, in turn, allow the emergence of the devastating capitalist "ecological regime" that is responsible for the current ecologic crisis (Leonardi 2018: 43)[33].

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[32] But also, to take a more relevant example, in some postmodern constructionist approaches language gives form to an otherwise formless matter.

[33] Pellizzoni (2015) argues that neoliberal "politics of nature" are based not so much on these dichotomies but rather on their blurring. I will engage in more detail with this point, which I largely share, later in the chapter. For now, I would like to remark that these dualisms seem to persist in many forms of discourse and practice both at institutional and

On the contrary, Deleuze famously worked towards an immanentist philosophy, arguing that matter and thought, things and symbols belong to one and the same ontological plane (Brown 2012). This does not mean that one level is reducible to the other, but rather that neither is more ‘real’ and explanatory. Hence, humans, society, language, etc. do not exist apart from (and, worse, above) the rest of the world; they are not ontologically consistent entities but emerge as the relational result of processes of assembly. This view challenges the anthropocentric “human exceptionalism” (Foster 2012) that posits human beings as separate from and superior to the rest of nature. Further, it highlights that matter and nature, once deprived of a transcendent ‘mind’ operating on them, should also be granted a vitality on their own: they are not an inert substratum of human manipulation but traversed by active and creative forces (Cerrato 2013; St. Pierre 2013).

This vision helps us to develop an analytic sensitivity attuned to a present in which, with environmental degradation and climate change, all the material aspects of the world forcefully claim attention and assert their irreducibility to our control (Dunlap et al. 2002). In line with repeated calls for materialist analyses of socio-economic processes (Alier 2002), reconnection to the world-as-(living-)matter (Salleh 2017) and to our bodies as affective, relational, beings (Adams forthcoming), such view can contribute to an emancipatory critique to the metaphysics that discarded them in favour of abstract reason. Also, the idea of a vitally material world discourages a paternalistic commitment to ‘preserve’ and ‘protect’ nature – which is no less than the correlative of the anthropocentric assumption that it is passive, innocent and fragile (Goh 2008; Haraway 2016). On the contrary, it pushes us to relate to it as a force on our ‘own’ plane. The researcher’s senses are attuned to the complexity of energy by constructing (social) reality as a dynamic and ‘flat’ intermingling of semiotic systems, material affordances, energetic flows. Finally, it opens a new epistemological view on the work of the social scientist. I move to consider these issues in turn.

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everyday levels (Avallone, forthcoming). In the social sciences, for instance, we often continue to conceptualise the ‘social’ realm of language and meaning-making, evolution and History as different from a-historical matter and nature (Ingold 2011). Also, they endure in certain forms of neoliberal ecological governmentality (Oels 2006; McKechnie and Welsh 2002) and in policy approaches like information-deficit and ABC models that privilege disembodied rationality over the body, affects and inter-connectedness by constructing individuals as autonomous and rational decision-makers.

4.2. Assemblages, becoming, desire

If, as just seen, the world cannot be understood as organised by (transcendent) essences, we see it emerges *relationally* (Dewsbury 2011). As a consequence, the "minimum real unit" of analysis and investigation is no longer this or that individual, piece of technology, knowledge, 'place', house, etc. – but the *assemblages* of "physical, biological, psychic, social, verbal" bodies they form (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 51)[34]. The material constitution of assemblages we call "state of things"; symbolic utterances, ideologies, knowledge, etc. "assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000; 2014). State of things and enunciations are "non-parallel formalizations", meaning that they do not cor-respond to each other but rather have the same function within a given assemblage (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 71). For instance, the habitual use of gas central heating sediments over time in assemblages made of infrastructural systems of provision (gas extraction, pipes, legislation, boilers, etc.); social norms and embodied sensations around appropriate heat; bodies' more durable as well as contingent dispositions; etc. Although this view sounds not too different from social practices' or ANT's (e.g. Moore 2015), conceptualising assemblages through Deleuzian-Guattarian lenses entails some important elements of difference.

First, Deleuze and Guattari's work allows us to introduce a psychosocial dimension to the study of everyday life that is sensitive to how macro-social dynamics impinge on micro-level energy practices[35]. Central to Deleuze and Guattari's (2014) conceptualisation of assemblages is, in fact, *desire*[36]. Desire, a force of aggregation and

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[34] Such an approach is important to us because thinking in terms of collectives and not of individuals is "at the right scale for addressing the ecological era" (Morton 2012: 13-14). But despite the centrality of the concept of "assemblage" to my research, I refrain from appealing to "assemblage theory" (see DeLanda 2006a; 2006b) as if it were a unified, coherent and self-enclosed way of approaching the social. I will instead dedicate this section to an overview of how I use this concept by considering the wider body of texts by Deleuze and Guattari from which it emerges.

[35] This addresses some of the social practice studies' deficiencies identified above (§2.3) and is in line with remarks about the importance of studying everyday life also in its psychic-desiring nuances (§3). It also integrates the downsides of psychosocial approaches by engaging more explicitly with macro levels of social organization (§2.4).

[36] So much so that Deleuze and Parnet (2007: 70) even conflate the two: "How can the assemblage be refused the name it deserves, 'desire'?". This close interrelation is incredibly under-considered in social science literature (notable exceptions are: Mazzei 2013; Ringrose and Coleman 2013). From this derives some vagueness on the processes of assemblage-formation. Martin and Kamberelis (2013) talk about "power". But Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 530-1 – footnote) quite explicitly take distance from this: tracing the

disjunction, is precisely what draws assemblages' elements together or apart. And if its centrality betrays the profound relations that the two philosophers have with psychoanalysis, we need to be cautious not to identify the two visions. *Anti-Oedipus* starts precisely with a critique of psychoanalysis' conception of desire as subjective and human drive, determined by lack: *I* desire because I am *not* – not full, not complete – and seek (invariably frustrated) to overcome it through the encounter with another subject/object (Treppiedi 2013). For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is an a-human force that pertains to the world as such, in its material constitution, a lively and generative force that is characterised by positive *productivity* rather than negative lack.

Desiring processes do not indicate deeper, unconscious, realities and do not work at the level of a symbolic psychic imaginary. On the contrary, desire produces (material and real) assemblages made of objects, utterances, embodied affects, etc. This productivity, furthermore, cannot be reduced to any structural determination, like the Oedipal triangle; or to the re-iteration of past experiences and traumas: it is actual (Godani 2014). Desire works as a "machine" that connects and cuts bits of reality: words, part-objects, body-parts, sounds, images, etc. Desire's productivity is also political and revolutionary because it troubles efforts to stabilise and order reality (Deleuze and Guattari 2000; Treppiedi 2013; Vandoni et al. 2014)[37]. It is irreducible to social determinations and the "dispositives" (see Foucault 1991; Deleuze 2010b) that shape its flows in ways certain, non-neutral, ways[38].

In this framework we can re-read the evidence on everyday energy use reviewed above. By putting emphasis on the desiring quality of processes of assembly we are sensitised to the largely unconscious, partially a-signifying/significant, a-rational nature

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development of a "theory of statements" in Foucault, they remark that one of their "only points of disagreement" is that "to us the assemblages seem fundamentally to be assemblages not of power but of desire (desire is always assembled), and power seems to be a stratified dimension of the assemblage". This oversight might be due to the favouring among social scientists of *A Thousand Plateaus* over the previous *Anti-Oedipu*s (Deleuze and Guattari 2000), where desire features more explicitly (a preference that, by the way, may not be casual given that the Marxist-inflected – and hence unfashionable? – critique to capitalist political and libidinal economy is articulated more explicitly in *Anti-Oedipu*s). Yet, the latter is inextricably relevant to the former so, I believe, we gain more in-depth understanding by reading the two jointly.

[37] This does not mean it is absolutely fluid and self-determining, an-other of social organisation – which is indeed also produced by desire. The issue is that social life demands its productive force to be controlled.

[38] There are evidently overlaps with Foucault's theory of power. For a discussion and endorsement of assemblage thinking as a better device for social analysis, see: Di Masso and Dixon (2015).

of established patterns of energy use. At the same time, everyday energy assemblages cannot be seen as contingent, private, or politically neutral but always part of wider "social machines" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 90). Via processes of subjectification, they (re)produce certain unequal patterns of energy/resource distribution. The apparently innermost felt experience of preferences, pleasures, embodied feelings, beliefs, etc. are part of socio-historical trajectories (Larson 2008; Landman 2014).

Yet, the studies above also testify to the *failure* of social dispositives' efforts at control – for instance, in the ineffectiveness of behaviour change policies. As seen in §2.2, interpretive and other qualitative studies show that social actors often express eccentric positions with respect to social demands for sustainability. And this is not because they are disinterested in ecological problems and solutions, but rather because they do not straightforwardly accept the ways in which they are institutionally constructed – for they are at odds with lived contingent everyday experience, values, desires, politics. As social scientists, we might cherish the singularity of desire's un-closed, productive nature as an instrument of (ecological) emancipation. For instance, the fact that the push to individually take pro-environmental actions is met with frustration by people who feel they lack institutional support opens the ground for a collective re-thinking of the very individualising framing of ecological intervention and hence, possibly, more thoroughgoing reconfigurations of social ecologies.

The shift with regards to psychoanalytically-oriented research (see §2.4.1) is also evident. Unconscious desire is no longer an anxiety-ridden individual barrier to energy transitions: a) it is part of wider dynamics that inform (more or less sustainable) energy and material flows; b) it has a capacity to *create* singular and novel, possibly more ecologically-compatible, assemblages. This view counters as both politically problematic and ultimately ineffective any attempt at disciplining desiring productivity, for instance by appealing to a (heteronomously defined) "reality principle" (Parker 2015). By rejecting the idea that our talk and fantasies are to be interpreted as signs of deeper unconscious structures that (only) psychoanalytic practice can uncover, any position of expert knowledge is rejected (see Wetherell 2005). While retaining a psychosocial emphasis, we immanently address desiring productions – assemblages – that emerge as everyday life is lived.

We now need to address the issue of the stabilisation and especially evolution of assemblages – a central one for energy *transitions*, and with which many of the approaches reviewed above seem to struggle with. Deleuze and Guattari (2014: esp. 8-

21; 39-74; 149-156; 208-231) tell us that, as given social formations try to stabilise relations, desire is channelled into certain assemblages that are thereby “territorialised”: assume certain preferred forms, are seen as ‘right’. The result is a “striated space” of interlinking hegemonic (“molar”) ways of acting, saying, feeling, using, consuming, etc. (see also Cheah 2010). Territorialisations are to a certain extent necessary and not problematic *per se*. But because desire is singularly and stubbornly productive, for each molar attempt to pin it down, there are infinite “molecular” movements and “lines of flight” that escape existent inscriptions[39]: centrifugal forces that *de*territorialise assemblages[40]. Lines of flight are lines of “becoming” along which bodies, in assemblages, become-other than what they are or, better, are made to be.

Becoming is a central concept in Deleuze’s thought, a very promising one for studying transitions since it is concerned with the dynamic unfolding of reality. Quite elusive, it is almost better understood in terms of what it is *not*:

> Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing’, ‘being’, ‘equalling’, or ‘producing’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 239).

From this definition, we might start to notice a few things. First of all, becoming is a matter of non-identity. Consider a movement of “becoming-animal”, say between ‘me’ and a cat. In our everyday lives we tend to experience cats as pets who keep ‘us’, human beings, company – for example as they sit on our laps and we stroke their back. This is quite different from a becoming-cat. In this case, the encounter between me and the cat becomes a “zone of proximity” where both of us are dragged down a line of flight: I cease to coincide with my territorialised self (human, white, female) while the cat is no longer the reassuring pet I normally take it to be (see Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 232-309; see

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[39] To be sure, these are no less social, but ‘eccentric’ with regards to socially preferred flows is emphasised (Deleuze and Parnet 2007).

[40] The idea that assemblages are traversed by lines of becoming and flight also signs a second point of difference (and positive contribution) that a Deleuzian-Guattarian take on assemblages affords compared to, for instance, ANT and social practice theory. ANT tends to see assemblages as ‘networks’ of objects, people, discourses, etc. that, as relatively discrete entities, are *connected* (territorialised, we might say) by lines. For Deleuze (and Guattari) the line is not something that connects but that passes in-between and makes the elements of assemblages other-than-themselves – i.e. it *deterritorialises* (Ingold 2008).

also Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 73). This does not mean that I imitate or become *the* cat, or vice versa. We do not merge nor domesticate each other to become similar. Also, me-becoming-cat is not a matter of *producing* anything specific, maybe a genetically modified super-powerful Catwoman! It is, as the idea of "flight" suggests, primarily a desertion from a territorialised position, a negation, a suspension of one's place in the world that only foregrounds possible new productions[41].

Becoming is maybe the foremost example of desire's *de*territorialising tendencies – praised by Deleuze and Guattari, to a certain extent, because of its creative potential. But it cannot be over-emphasised that deterritorialisation is complementary to and inextricable from processes of territorialisation: lines of flight *need re*territorialisation in new assemblages if they are not to end up in completely formless, *un*productive, sterile and therefore deadly spaces ("black holes"). I also believe that this conceptualisation of desiring assemblages has interesting parallels with the ways I sketched everyday life in §3: a space of habitual repetition (territorialisation) and novelty (de- and re-territorialisation), traversed by "molar" lines and "molecular" resisting, ones. Further, these lines are both social/collective *and* concretely experienced. Hence, we can relate everyday occurrences to wider systemic issues through an immanent critique: what are the lines of flight that, by traversing everyday assemblages, signal *social* demands of emancipation? The materialism of this approach also suggests that one of our allies is *the body*[42]: "the physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different" (Adorno 1973: 203; see also Guattari 2000; Marcuse 1992). To some bases for an ecological critique I now turn.

4.3. Towards a pragmatics of affects

One of the tasks that a philosophy of immanence confronts a social scientist with is the necessity of not making violence to life as lived by imposing on it abstract moral principles (Smith and High 2017). But how is the critique of everyday energy assemblages possible in the first place, then? Environmentalist discourses normally appeal precisely to abstract/universalist principles, in the fashion of what we might call a

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[41] In passing, it should be noticed that this view of becoming as *im*productive tends to confirm the distance between Deleuzian philosophy and appropriative neoliberal constructionism (see below, §4.3, 4.4).

[42] All the more so because it is the matter through which we are most obviously connected with the rest of nature.

'Kantian' morality: the categorical imperative to "save the planet", for instance. Yet, this approach is criticisable because it does not recognise the embodied and embedded nature of everyday ethics, moralities and values. These often have to do with a concern (but also, arguably, a desire) to live a 'good life' rather than with respecting codes of conduct (Lambek 2010). One first step in the direction of investigating everyday energy ethics is to *describe* how people live and interpret their practices, contextually, through their own accounts: interpretively (Groves et al. 2017; Frigo 2017). Studying energy assemblages in terms of desire and affects might bring us a step further: an immanent critique.

In this, we are helped by the pragmatics of affects that Deleuze (2013) develops through engagement with Spinoza. Affects, like ideas, are ways of knowing the world but, contrary to ideas, they are non-representational and non-linguistic (see also Crociani-Winland and Hoggett 2012; Thompson and Hoggett 2012): *experienced* by bodies as continuous variation of potency, or life force (Deleuze 2013; but also 2002)[43]. Life is made of an alternating succession of encounters: "good" ones happen when two bodies combine well together and form a wider aggregate, they increase life potency and produce an affect of "joy"; if, instead, a body encounters something that does not combine favourably with it, the relations whereby it is constituted are disrupted or even dissolved, so that "bad" encounters diminish life force and are expressed by the affect of "sorrow". Joyful processes of assembly are those that allow one to *relate* to the world – hence to know it and act on this knowledge creatively. Bad encounters, on the contrary, generate *separation* and therefore ignorance.

Some words of caution. The account of joy-intelligence and sorrow-stupidity, although framed by Spinoza in terms of the capacity to form "accurate ideas" about the world (see Deleuze 2013), I believe is best understood *not* as a (realistic) quest for picturing reality *as it is*. Intelligence is rather a matter of openness to encounters, the capacity to affect and be affected, to create zones of proximity that set in motion processes of *becoming(-other)*. Further, because life potency is always dependent on encounters, I do not see affects as the property of one single body but of assemblages. This distinction signals the line between will-to-power as individualistic self-affirmation and will-to-potency as search for flourishing *in* things, *with* things and not *despite* things (see Deleuze

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[43] That affects are not reducible to ideas does not mean they are independent from them, though, for their variations also depend on ideas. In passing, we might notice that the Deleuzian-Nietzschean "will to potency" (see Deleuze 2002) is linked to Deleuze-Spinoza's "*conatus*" or life force.

2002). Living and experiencing the potency of the world, being affected by its intensity, which deterritorialises our-Selves.

4.4. An ecology of joyful assemblages

Above, I have argued for the potentialities of a non-dualistic and non-transcendent philosophy in displacing the human exceptionalism that has determined our ecologic crises. Before proceeding any further we nonetheless need to pause and address a possible issue with this. Pellizzoni (2011; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016) has rightly pointed out that the blurring of the human-nature boundary that contemporary 'flat' ontologies perform is not in contrast with, but *dangerously close to*, contemporary neoliberal discourses. These also see the world as unfolding in the contingency of fluid assemblages. Yet, far from being emancipatory, are foregrounding a new kind of "mastery of nature" that, by taking advantage of the (assumed) malleability of the natural world seeks to shape it according to their own designs. Although I believe there is much to be taken from this view in terms of critiquing *certain* contemporary flat ontologies, it seems to me there is something more to the Deleuzian perspective here endorsed that might correct these dangers[44].

First, recognising the potency of (material) becoming means that the world remains forever 'uncanny', un-controllable and irreducible because perpetually deterritorialised from the forms we try to impose on it[45]. This *discourages* an optimistic belief of control and manipulation at will (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 409). Hence, a terraforming project such as global capitalism cannot but be predicted to generate disastrous long-term effects, since nature continuously spills out from this project of mastery (see Shiva 2009; Bello 2009). Further, to my sensitivity, *becoming* displaces us as human beings not in the sense that we are lead to 'merge' with the rest of the world to enhance our capacities (as, for instance, with the idea of the cyborg: see Haraway 1991)

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[44] Notably, Pellizzoni's critique is in fact generally addressed to New Materialisms, ANT and other "post-constructionist" social theories that – as argued above – although claiming, and surely counting, inspiration from Deleuzian philosophy *do not coincide* with it.

[45] Although for this reason not at all immune to power's "hold" (Pellizzoni 2016: 4). We have already underscored above (§4.2) that desire assembles discourses as much as matter is power-ridden ways. Vital irreducibility is here understood as that 'excess' of becoming (the line of flight) which traverses a reality that nonetheless *irredeemably is* shaped by social "machines".

– but rather in such a way that the very idea of *enhancement* no longer holds sense. How this is so will be clearer from the discussion below.

Having considered both the arguments and the caveats above, we can start to construct an ecological ethics – as much tentative as it surely is. Emphasis on trans-human desire, affects and becoming displaces human agency and intentionality so that appeals to any morality become undesirable. Instead, we can envisage an ecological and political *Aesth-etics* that starts form our idea of life and desire as productive and of joy as that process of assembly that allows such productivity to be expressed. A life-affirmative productivity is one that happens *with* and not *despite* others – hence a joyful assemblage produces without simultaneously annihilating. This view can be articulated in, first, a critique to capitalism as deadly, hence sorrowful, social machine and, second, in an everyday ethics of energy.

Deleuze and Guattari (2000)[46] argue that capital has its own "axiomatic", which articulates around: money as abstract general equivalent, the denial of limit, anti-production within production (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 33; 198-199; 240ff.). These are all premised on capital as a "full body", i.e. an entity that claims to be infinitely powerful because infinitely able to re-produce itself in an expansive way[47]. This axiomatic has profoundly negative ecological consequences that we can also see as *sorrowful*. First, the lively concreteness of the world is annihilated by being reduced to a series of exchangeable abstract (dead) values. Second, 'perverse' denial of limit (Redaelli 2014), embodied in claims to infinite growth, results in a process of planetary mastering that (tries to) subdue the planet to its own designs[48].

By these two processes, the *singularity* and difference of the world is forcefully submitted to the imperatives of an economy indifferent to its paces, force, qualities (Marcuse 1972; 1992; Lefebvre 2014; Salleh 2017). Since what is not in line with efficiency and productivist dogmas is erased, ecosystems lose their internal and external

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[46] The authors give important contributions to understanding capitalist socio-economic, libidinal and affective organisation; which there is unfortunately no space to delve into here. A few remarks will for now suffice.

[47] They follow Marx (2003) here, and in particular his famous formula: M-C-M' – money is turned into commodities which, once sold in the market, generate increased amounts of money.

[48] I have elsewhere reflected on Lacan's important contribution regarding the perversion of capitalism (see Dal Gobbo 2016).

difference (Guihan 2008)[49]. Furthermore, capitalist-industrial ‘desynchronisation’ and delinking of the economy from natural times and affordances generate a “metabolic rift between human beings and nature” that further impoverishes life and its richness in variation[50] (Foster 2012: 213; Adam 1997). The third point is more difficult to tackle briefly. Be it enough to notice that capitalist productivity is premised upon a continuous process of destruction. For instance, in order to grow by selling increasing amounts of commodities, these need to become quickly obsolescent (spoil, go out of fashion)[51]. In all three cases, at any rate, we see that capital produces but simultaneously destroys: it affirms it-Self *despite* Life.

This political-economic “rift” has consequences on the level of subjectivity and everyday life. As the typically capitalist-industrial “separation of production and consumption fragments and mystifies … awareness of the consequential loops between labour, resources, time, and so-called ecological waste”, human beings become separated from the concrete dynamics of existence: they are impoverished in their affective capacities and lack control over the rhythms and materials that are at the very basis of life. This makes them dependent on established (and hierarchical) flows of power, knowledge and matter (Salleh 2017: 184; Zerzan 2002). In the meantime, desires are shaped along the spiralling lines of capital accumulation via production, circulation and disposal of commodities; they are traversed by consumerism and its drive towards an excessive appropriation of things – excessive because its perpetuation needs a continuous process of destruction (Pitasi 2014; Hoggett 2013). This is also a sorrowful condition because easy disposal of objects and experiences forever on the verge of becoming obsolescent does not allow us to establish significant relations with things: a materialistic way of life that is actually *anti*-materiality (Bennett 2005).

Now, one first thing that these remarks suggest is that domination, exploitation, disposability and impoverishment of nature by human beings invests humans *and* non-

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[49] For instance, in industrial agriculture crops are selected and modified for maximising yield – so that only a few types are now dominating the market and, we should say, with further life-threatening consequences such as food insecurity (see Shiva 2010). In business but also, increasingly, in education humans are trained to devote their whole lives to self-entrepreneurship and optimisation. Animals are bred for meeting standards of profit and their lives reduced to being providers of food for humans.

[50] The most evident example being the earth’s Sixth Mass Extinction Event that we are presently witnessing (Morton 2012; Haraway 2016).

[51] That capital has *its own deadly ways to keep alive* is also testified by the well-known fact that, historically and especially with the case of WWII, wars have relaunched capitalist economies from economic recessions as they rendered necessary industries of (quite literally) death and, later, the reconstruction of destroyed territories.

humans together (Bennett 2004; Hayden 2008; Adams forthcoming; Guattari 2000; Zerzan 2002). This, in line with our non-dualistic view, recalls what the Frankfurt School (esp.: Adorno 1997: 67; see also Adorno and Horkheimer 2002; Marcuse 1972; 2002) already noticed: if there is no ontological separation between humans and nature, then the latter's instrumentalization corresponds to a self-instrumentalization. Hence, the fundamental co-extensiveness of ecological and political emancipatory critique is confirmed (Gorz 1980). Secondly, we can start to think about what more 'ecological' (or 'sustainable') everyday energy assemblages could look like. If one fundamental source of ecological damage is the deadly and sorrowful axiomatic of capitalism, then the suggestion is to look for life-affirmative and joyful *minor* assemblages that in some way elude it and hold the promise of new revolutionary subjectivities[52].

These should involve a re-embedding within ecologies that is respectful of, and almost 'in love with', their difference, irreducibility, endurance; escape the logic of anti-production. Some characters might be: revaluation and reconnection with (our own) lively and concrete matter (e.g. sensuous appreciation of the singularity of a body, a fruit, a need); re-synchronising our metabolic exchanges with natural rhythms and cycles (seasonality); closeness to things and objects, their enduring qualities, their affective intensities (independent and autonomous knowledge); anti-appropriation and limitation to material consumption (recycling, reusing, making things last, DIY); (re)productive activities that do not affirm our needs *against* the other inhabitants of our ecosystems (e.g. certain kinds of organic/natural agriculture) (Hagbert and Bradley 2017). But, as creation in/with resistance happens at the level of processes of subjectification, it is immanent, open to becoming and not defined by a set of values/established traits. Hence, the reader should be advised that this list of tendencies is only indicative and needs to be empirically mapped (in turn, a necessarily contingent endeavour because premised on the researcher's full involvement).

We finally can appreciate the emancipatory character of desire in this context. As our everyday energy assemblages are shaped by life-negating forces and sorrowful affects, desiring lines of flight might create spaces of suspension that may in turn

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[52] Ecofeminist and decolonial perspectives mention activities of "meta-industrial work": informal economies of self-production, mutual help, cooperation, local exchange, reproductive labour… These are at once integral to capitalist organisation (because exploited by it) and simultaneously irreducible to it because they do not respond to the logic of abstract equivalence, denial of limit, anti-production (Salleh 2017: 305-306; Shiva 2010). I feel very close to these suggestions, but I prefer to somehow open the scope and scape of 'joyful', ecological, assemblages.

foreground experimentations with more life-affirmative, ecological, ones. By showing instances of 'ecological becoming' in daily assemblages it is possible to combine the study of everyday life with an ecological critique of capitalist political economy in as far as we find the latter deploying forces that constrain ecological reconnections and close down possibilities of life 'being otherwise'. The point is not to assert deterritorialisation over territorialisation *tout court*, but rather to point to those aspects of reality that enact and embody "critique".

A few more words of caution. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) idea of desire has been criticised for being precisely the correlative (and ideological justification) of consumerist omnivorous appropriation of the earth (e.g. Recalcati 2014). This criticism, though, is based on too partial a consideration of such politics of desire (see Bazzicalupo 2014; Pitasi 2014; Redaelli 2014; Berardi 2014). Firstly, as Deleuze and Parnet (2007) emphasise, desire and enjoyment are wrongly assimilated to one another in this critique. Enjoyment, indeed, really *stops* desire: if I am too content with a comfortable situation, I tend to 'sit' in it – so lines of flight are curtailed, and with them the very premises of critique[53]. That desire defies structural determinations does not mean that it does not know or want limits. The point, very political, is rather that it should live *by its own limits* and be in the condition of generating its own assemblages[54].

And it may be even possible that desire becomes our greatest ecological ally. If contemporary assemblages are largely pre-fabricated along the lines of destructive material appropriation; then molecular desires and lines of flight will tend to *limit* and *subtraction* from material(istic) enjoyments (Deleuze and Parnet 2007). Hence, instead of thinking limitation in terms of self-denial, guilt and sorrow, we might say that there is

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[53] This point resonates with Marcuse's (2002: 59ff.) idea that, by filling up people with commodities, consumer society maintains social order through a process of "repressive *de*sublimation": too much material enjoyment prevents the sublimation of drives and the imagination of new worlds. Yet, in my view, the very idea that 'sublimation' might be desirable is not in line with Deleuze and Guattari's vision of libido as productive (and not consuming) force.

[54] There is a huge distance between this construction of desire and neoliberal subjectivity, which not only affirms it-Self over and against the others through appropriation *but also* is fundamentally *aligned* to the capitalist axiomatic – hence, its apparent demand of self-determination is the ultimate measure of its *subjection* to molar lines of desire. At this point the basis of my critique to the neoliberal moralisation of everyday energy use (§2.1). I have argued that it had the effect of subjecting subjects to a pre-established ordered that defines what "sustainability" is; but as one posits the necessity for desire to be open to singular production, constraining it within the boundaries of hetero-determined life-forms appears on the one hand repressive and on the other doomed to failure.

a *joyful* scope *for desire itself* to demand them as a way of freeing itself from the productivist/consumerist dogmas of capital's run towards economic growth (Readelli 2014; Hawkins 2009). In line with this *Aesth-etics*, "joy" has nothing to do with the chase for human (or ecosystemic, or natural) enhancement; nor with a triumphal sentiment of self-affirmation or a straightforwardly 'happy' reconciliation with the world. In my view, it means experiencing its intensity. And this leads *a* life to require nothing more: being sufficient to itself – *bare* openness to the world, as in ascetic beatitude (Deleuze 2010a; see also Pellizzoni 2015: 214)[55]. The ethics that results might then be one of *not* doing and appropriating: *becoming-imperceptible*.

4.5. 'The subject' and energy transitions

The analysis in §6 will help us elucidate whether the picture just sketched can be of help in studying and fostering sustainable transitions. We now need to pause for a moment and consider in some more depth the issue of the subject. This category has been variously deployed as a way to bridge the gap between 'the social' and 'the individual' while not reducing the one to the other; it is also central for psychosocial scholarship on sustainable transitions. The subject, conceptualised as a "thoroughly socially constructed" "person" who emerges through intersubjective interactions, is said to be the site of desires, investments, characters that have social contents but are nevertheless "distinctive" and unique (Taylor 2015: 17; Hollway and Jefferson 2013). As seen above, psychosocial scholars often hold that subjects might (or should) assume responsibility for sustainable transitions. Yet, pre-individual desire as life-force and the assemblage perspective question this: they problematise the inner/outer distinction and question the degree of agency that subjects have in intentionally and rationally change their behaviours or practices (Larson 2008; MacLure 2013b; see also Blackman and Venn 2010; Davies et al. 2013).

This does not mean that the subject disappears completely, but it is reconceptualised, and with it its agency and responsibilities. First, instead of focussing on persons, we look at "fields" (Larson 2008; Carmagnola 2014) and "Existential Territories" (Walkerdine 2013). Subjectification is, partly, a process of territorialisation

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[55] It is not by chance, I believe, that Deleuze was attracted to ascetic and mystical figures (Spinoza, Scoto) who organised their lives around limits to material appropriation and consumption (Cerrato 2013).

in which existential lines stretching from the past and reaching towards the future give some kind of consistency and continuity to everyday life. Hence, the subject is a "conjunctive synthesis" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000), the product of habitus (Deleuze 1991; 1993). In this perspective, transitions to sustainability cannot be expected to happen by an act of will nor by the elaboration of 'internal' psychic contents: energy use is patterned along lines that attach 'us' and certain practices, objects, sensations, rhythms… and are to a large extent beyond conscious control. Simultaneously, the subject can also be seen as a process of *de*territorialisation (Davies et al. 2013). Lines of flight always traverse assemblages. When they are suddenly embraced, "events" happen: moments of rupture where "real rebellious spontaneity" is enacted, centripetal with respect to established systems of desire, power and knowledge (Deleuze and Negri 1990; Deleuze and Parnet 2007; see also Angelini 2018; Stenner 2017). Subjectification is also a (collective) becoming.

How can we think *agency*, then? At what level should one locate the capacity to produce change: how do transitions emerge? According to DeLanda (2006a), a vitalist approach would lead one to shift the agency that is normally attributed to human beings to matter itself, but doing so can amount to a dangerous 'colonisation' and reduction of the world to anthropocentric categories (Salleh 2016)[56]. Secondly, creation and becoming take place in the interstices of matter-things, in-between bodies, rather than being a property 'of' them. The capacity to act cannot be localised *in* something: change happens in and through encounters (see also Jackson 2013b). Hence, I believe it better to put 'agency' altogether aside.

As we question that social actors can autonomously and freely choose actions and their effects, we challenge the tendency to attribute *responsibility* for sustainability change to one or another social actor – individuals, governments, the economy (Georgescu-Roegen 2003). Might this not be dangerous? Not necessarily. For, if "the productive power behind effects is always a collectivity" (Bennett 2005: 463), what we *can* question is the collectivity itself – the forms it takes and the opportunity it offers (or forecloses). Throughout my analysis, therefore, central will not be one or another's efforts to act more ecologically, but rather the intermesh of material-semiotic, desiring, lines that afford or prevent sustainable assemblages to emerge: molar and molecular, territorialised

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[56] Ingold (2007; 2010b) is also critical of approaches that attribute 'agency' to objects: the point about being attentive to the material constitution of reality means appreciating the vitality of things in their continuous material and energetic exchanges.

and deterritorialised, “counter-actualised” and missed. Responsibility has become a matter of “response-ability” to the worlds’ unfolding (Haraway 2016: 11)[57].

4.6. Epistemology after all: Deleuze and qualitative social research

The epistemological and methodological implications of a ‘flat’ ontology bring me close to the context of a nascent literature that self-defines “post-qualitative”[58] (Davies et al. 2013: 680; Lather 2013; MacLure 2013a). The latter claims to signal a cut from previous social sciences[59]. Yet, in some contrast with advocates of this approach, I would like to highlight elements of difference but also *continuity* with qualitative research, aiming to expand the landscape of available approaches to social research. I have already explained my position with respect to psychoanalysis. Regarding interpretivist accounts, there is a common anti-positivist orientation: emphasis is not on the ‘what’, the essence of social phenomena, but on the ways they function in the world. This does not mean that a “genealogical” approach is completely surrendered (see Deleuze 1993; Nietzsche 1984; Foucault 1991). But attention is given to generative processes and the ways in which past (and future) lines are actualised and bear on the present (and future) (Thrift 2000; Braidotti 2006a).

And although interpretivism poses the question of *meaning*, I would argue that the interest is not so much on what people ‘really think’ or about the relation between their meanings and ‘reality’. The point, as for me, is to evaluate how meanings function in the world, what possibilities do they open or close. To this, I add attention to non-significant

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[57] And in saying so I am not suggesting that it is an ‘individual’ capability either: it is a political matter, it has to do with how much my own body is and has been made capable by the assemblages it is part of.

[58] Though I do not particularly like or share this definition: still another “post” which seems to me even more vague and unwarranted than others.

[59] The issue is well posed by Lather and St. Pierre (2013: 620-630): “If we cease to privilege knowing over being; if we refuse positivist and phenomenological assumptions about the nature of lived experience and the world; if we give up representational and binary logics; if we see language, the human, and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated “on the surface” – if we do all that and the “more” it will open up – will qualitative inquiry as we know it be possible? Perhaps not.” Yet, I do believe that there can be far more continuity between qualitative and “post-qualitative” research than they allow. I rather think both as *qualitative research*, the latter being but one of many different expressions of it.

and non-linguistic affects, matters, energies[60]. We are thus led to a post-representational approach: if thought and matter are part of one and the same plane of immanence, and the latter is contingently emergent, there is no ‘reality’ that social scientists ‘interpret’ and ‘represent’ through language. The two are no longer ontologically separated but part of a process whereby Being expresses itself (Deleuze 2013; MacLure 2013b): each enunciation is a world-forming rather than world-representing act[61].

Some words of caution, again. Yet, this poses another problem. Pellizzoni (2015: 200) notices that in this position there is the presumption to know the world as it is. With Adorno (1973), he argues that it is this “identity thinking” more than transcendence *tout court*, to be at the basis of human domination of ‘nature’. Too much a self-assured onto-epistemology, no matter how flat or constructionist, can become a discourse of truth like any other metaphysics; and proof of this is that it has indeed become the instrument of neoliberal mastery of nature[62].

Again, while not dismissing (actually sharing) this critique, I would like to underscore that certain elements of Deleuzian philosophy can (paradoxically) be of help in avoiding these dangers. First, with Deleuze (2005b; see also Cerrato 2013) we are confronted with the virtual-actual binary that complicates any claim to knowledge. As Pellizzoni (2015: 95) himself recognises, even a “champion of ‘pure immanence’ like Gilles Deleuze (1994) … distinguishes between ‘virtual’ and ‘actual’ as the difference between general tendencies, potentialities and problematic knots on one side, and the way these potentialities find specific concretizations on the other”[63]. In other words, even if we maintain that knowledge produces reality, this does not mean that it *exhausts* it. Thought can claim at best to actualise part of the virtualities of the world; our own

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[60] This does not mean embracing a naïvely empiricist view that simply turns idealism “on its head”, as it were, by giving primacy to an allegedly unmediated knowledge of reality *as matter*. That would mean re-instating the dichotomy. Deleuze’s philosophy is also distant from phenomenological approaches claiming that one could know the world through empathy and involved affective/sensory engagement (see Dicks 2014 for a critique).

[61] Bennett (2005: 349) calls this “enchanted materialism”, an attitude of “naïve realism”. But “enchantment” and “naiveté” bear the great danger of deluding ourselves of a possible ‘fit’ between our knowledge of the world and the world itself.

[62] Morton (2012: 8) makes a similar point about Deleuze and Guattari’s thought – which he believes to be an anti-ecological metaphysics that continues Modernity’s path of putting “Man [sic] as the measure of all things”.

[63] We should, by the way, notice that this is also one of the reasons why, in the perspective here endorsed, assemblages *are not* completely fluid and arbitrarily emergent: for instance, the flows of desire (matter, energy) that constitute our societies are subjected to (or “overcoded” by, in Deleuzian-Guattarian language) the capitalist axiomatic described above – which actualises *certain*, very specific, virtualities.

sensuous knowledge depending on certain memories and investments (Seremetakis 1993). Such a (materialist) “transcendental empiricism” (Ringrose 2011: 599; see also Deleuze 1991; Barad 2003; St. Pierre 2013) cannot (or, better, *should not*) result in mastery, for there will always be an irreducible, unknown, ‘remainder’.

Furthermore, if on the plane of immanence thought can construct and produce the world, so can do many other processes. Hence, the very idea that human beings might assert their own will over a malleable world loses sense and indeed ‘free will’ starts to appear an “illusion” (Cerrato 2013: 322-323). We are thus lead to believe that any knowledge – even a flat ontology – cannot but be situated and emergent from one’s emplacement in the world[64]. This is in line with the debate on reflexivity in the social sciences: the ways researchers construct, investigate and interpret a field are always dependent on our positionalities; hence, they do not report a world *as it is*. It is normally said that a certain interpretation is produced. My only specification is that interpretation and representation are *per se* real things with real effects (see Haferkamp 2008).

The quality-politics of research. In a “post-representational” perspective, the issue of “accuracy of representations” (though not left aside) becomes problematic (Barad 2003: 804) and with it also the parameters on which the quality of qualitative research is normally assessed. “Validity”, “reliability” and “trustworthiness” (see Lincoln and Guba 1985), in fact, normally assess how much research is a good ‘description’ of the field. But this no longer holds if one believes that the field is *made* instead of represented. The world-making character of research brings centre stage the ethics and politics of research; its value starts to depend more on critical import than epistemic purity (Lefebvre 2014). Concerned with respecting the open nature of reality, a “minor science” practices “mapping”: evidences the lines of flight that play active part in the world’s becoming, points to hidden virtualities that are demanding actualisation (Deleuze and Guattari 2014, esp.: 12-25; 146; 296; 361-394). This does not rule out that we also describe the world, “trace” it (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 42). This is a perfectly legitimate, and indeed necessary, part of investigations (Blackman and Venn 2010). Yet, tracing tends to capture

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[64] These considerations bring me, in passing, back to the remarks made above regarding what we consider as ecologically-promising transition, or not. We often see movements *beyond anthropocentrism* as promising, for they signal a step towards desired reconnection and re-embedding of human beings within their wider ecologies. Nonetheless, both in theory *and* at the level of lived life, non-anthropocentric discourses might be seen as emancipatory only in as far as they do not claim for themselves absolute truth but are rather moved by conviction and *belief* in the world, in its radical un-closure and un-knowable dimensions.

lines of territorialisation only and risks to (reactionarily) fix a *given* image of reality (see Hayden 2008; Walkerdine 2010). Mapping and tracing should be correlative to each other: efforts to 'be true' to experience are accompanied by attentiveness to "moments" and "events", a way of looking and speaking reality that makes its hidden virtualities evident (Lefebvre 2014: 642; Coleman and Ringrose 2013; Dyke 2013).

Responsibility in this context lays in asking of our own creations – what do they do? what collectives does my act of enunciation generate, make visible, give voice to (Deleuze and Parnet 2007)? Without any doubt, this leaves the researcher as a funambulist in tension between remaining close to and going beyond 'observations'. Finding balance is a (political) dance. But I believe it should not lead one to say that analyses and conclusions are nothing but arbitrary 'stories' or 'fictions' – a danger that Greene (2013) rightly envisions in certain "post-qualitative" research. The peculiar materialism envisaged throughout this chapter, but also the situated experience of the field, with its intensities, in fact, call for a renewed "belief" in the world, grounded in that undetermined but stubbornly irreducible thing that is *life* (Orlie 2010). In this context, the affirmation that knowledge is emergent and contingent, that a stable and fixed world "has been taken from us" (Deleuze and Negri 1990), should be seen as an *opportunity* of radical creation rather than the basis for a nihilistic and relativist cynicism (Deleuze 2002; see also Bogue 2011; Cheah 2010; contra: Horowitz 1987; Renaud 2008). At the same time, believing in the world also means that this productive critique cannot but be *immanent*: a contribution to the art of living (Lefebvre 2014) whereby *life itself* generates its own normative basis for critique (Highmore 2002; Esposito 2004).

To be sure, immanent critique depends on the contingency of the research-assemblage and the host of further assemblages that intervene in it. So there is no sense in which researchers can alienate themselves from the "tapestry" of reality (Ingold 2008; 2011; see also Deleuze 2010a). But neither can reflexive practice give transparency or trustworthiness to accounts: we are always in a process of becoming-other. What the researcher can do is making explicit his/her positionality as a way of evidencing the partiality of the claims made. Furthermore, one can cultivate a respectful, symmetrical, positionality.

'I' and 'participants' can be seen as tangles, made of a number of different threads, similar to balls of wool. Threads are the lines that traverse us and make our lives what they are. Tangles are made of many territorialised threads that are plaited into themselves and towards the core of the bundle, relatively fixed. But there are also ends that escape this territorialisation, and maybe do not properly fly away, but remain open to be captured and stretched somewhere else. When the researcher-as-tangle encounters the participant-as-bundle, some of these free threads may encounter and a becoming might ensue: a deterritorialisation, a *new* territorialisation. Sudden realisations, maybe the effective articulation of a thought or feeling by the researcher for the participant and vice versa, open different ways of experiencing and doing things. As we are involved in processes of double-capture, lines of flight can be a source of deterritorialising knowledge both for everyday assemblages *and* researcher's pre-established schemas (Kristmunsdottir 2002; see also Hall et al. 2012; Deleuze and Parnet 2007), thus foregrounding a properly emancipatory and non-hierarchical knowledge (Blaise 2013). This is what I sought to do with my research; in the next chapter we shall see how.

Chapter five
Methods

The main methodological gap in the literature is that, despite interest in (and the centrality of) materiality, affects and practices, the overwhelming majority of qualitative studies on everyday energy transitions rely on language-based methods, particularly interviews (see also Blackman and Venn 2010; Ellsworth-Krebs 2015; Miller 2003; Emerson et al. 2011; Mulhall 2002). I address this issue through participant observation. Yet, the "post-representational" perspective sketched out above implies a need to partially reconceptualise such research practice (Vannini and Taggart 2014). Centrally, the idea that we might 'go into a field' is challenged, as seen, because the field is *created*, with the intention of speaking not *about* it but *with* it (Simon 2013; Davies et al. 2013). As Michael (2016: 650) remarks, "sociologist and participant – 'method assemblage' and 'reality' – co-emerge out of their interactions" so that "the 'research event' can be regarded as processual, unfolding, oriented toward the not-as-yet". Choices about design are, therefore, guided not so much by the question: how can you get to know reality (in the most truthful way: representational approach)? But rather: what reality do you want to actualise (constructionist approach[65])?

Many methodological points remain valid nonetheless. One of these is the prioritisation of an inductive approach that lets insights emerge from the field rather than imposing a pre-given hypothesis to test: openness to life *as it unfolds* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Coffey 1991; Thompson and Hoggett 2012; Neal 2015; Mulhall 2002; Jordan 2006; Wetherell 2015; contra: Miles and Huberman 1991). This also applies to design: we cannot know in advance rules or prescribed steps; methodology is emergent, open to the "radical possibility in the unfinalised" (Jackson 2013a: 123)[66]. This was all

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[65] This is not intended in the sense of "linguistic constructionism", in as far as the approach adopted does not accept language as main producer of reality. I refer instead to the view according to which, once rejected that the world is made of stable essences we need to think it as continuously made and re-made (constructed) through processes of (trans-human) assembly.

[66] It is of course unavoidable that a researcher goes to the field with a "framing" (Henwood et al. 2008), but it is important that this is constantly kept open and sensitive to the unexpected – something particularly well understood by researchers working in the grounded theory tradition (see e.g. Charmaz and Henwood 2008). The point in this, as

the truer since there is no one ‘paradigm’ of post-constructionist research and the philosophical presuppositions sketched above defeat theory/practice dualisms, calling on researchers to re-conceptualise the whole research process (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). Admittedly, constructing a method has been tentative and experimental – both a cause of excitement and insecurity. In what follows I outline and contextualise it as a contribution to contemporary qualitative social sciences.

5.1. The construction of a field

‘I’ was to create a field. But *what exactly* should it look like? The answer was not straightforward: everyday life encompasses a variety of interlinking practices and levels of experience; furthermore, ‘energy use’ is both invisible and constitutive of virtually the whole of our daily lives (Forde 2017). Also, assemblages are processual rather than essential, hence their boundaries open up and it becomes difficult to find the ‘right’ level of study (Gupta and Ferguson 1997)[67]. In many ways *life itself* became the field (Kristmundsdottir 2006), so design choices were guided mainly by my research question (see Bennett 2005). As much qualitative literature, I was concerned with in-depth understanding of micro-dynamics to be theoretically generalised: common elements linking ‘small’ stories to wider history (Walkerdine et al. 2013; De Certeau 2012). “Purposive” sampling strategies are adopted in the search for “information rich” cases. In constructing the field, I adopted an “intensity sampling” approach, whereby the complexity of the phenomena of interest is encapsulated in a few cases and observations (Patton 2002: 230-235; see also Lincoln and Guba 1985). Being concerned with the ordinariness of daily life, I targeted ‘intensely ordinary’ times, places, people… Yet, a research encounter is always extra-ordinary. Hence, I looked not so much for ‘representativeness’, but for a becoming-ordinary of the research encounter: its almost unsayable strangeness finding a routine, a common enterprise of constructing a normality.

5.1.1. Land-scapes

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much methodological as political, is cultivating a radically democratic “polisystemic attitude” (Vinale 2012: 168) that refuses to set (or accept) pre-defined agendas.

[67] Literature referring to ‘assemblages’ has identified them with such disparate things as the power grid (Bennett 2005) or the everyday (Bennett 2015).

The definition of the setting started very simply: me as localised, stratified, (de)territorialised body. More specifically, it started from where I have learned to live with environmental degradation, late capitalism, the economic crisis: my home town. A small, provincial town called Vittorio Veneto, situated in Italy's so-called "North East" – its already decadent feel, the past grandeur embodied in a few beautiful Renaissance buildings, its abandoned warehouses, fields, affluent middle classes, a countryside overcrowded by haphazardly built 1960s houses, factories closing down (the smell of biscuits that emanated from a factory close to the town centre, disappearing); but also the woods, some hard-to-die subsistence farmers, small hamlets, the expanding organic grocery shops and social enterprises…

A partial view of Vittorio Veneto from S. Augusta Sanctuary

Its recent history makes this site very 'intensive' in terms of my research questions (see Appendix A for a more detailed overview of the recent socio-economic trajectory of the region). Since the 1960s and until the 2008 financial crisis, this formerly poor agricultural region knew a strong economic development through an ecologically devastating widespread industrialisation. Affluence brought a strong desiring investment in capitalist expansion, its productivist dogmas and lately consumerist practices. Strongly hit by the 2008 recession, this area experienced also a socio-cultural crisis – the feeling that "suddenly, a way of life had come to an end" (Walkerdine 2010: 92).

This local and certainly peculiar case in its concreteness and emplacement can, I believe, resonate beyond itself and speak about close and distant desiring assemblages (all the more so nowadays, when any singularity is taken up in globalised trajectories): capitalist growth leading to ecological degradation, the financial crisis and its precariousness, but also (ecological) lines of flight (Paasi 1991; see also Brenner 2001; Massey 1991; Hollway and Jefferson 2013). In line with many ethnographic investigations, I chose a small area[68], Vittorio Veneto, as site. The choice was guided by pragmatic reasons such as time and resource constraints; but especially by an interest in contextual embeddedness – a search for a more resonant cartography of lines across cases (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

Further cautionary notes. I studied something I am "part of" (Becker and Faulkner 2008). This might be questionable if one assumes that ethnography should take place in exotic unfamiliar settings to better ensure objectivity and neutrality and to avoid taking for granted meanings and practices. Yet, after reflexive and post-constructionist turns in anthropology (see e.g. Denzin and Lincoln 1994) this norm has been questioned since researchers are now conceived as necessarily embedded in social relations (Hannerz 2006): insider-outsider, subjective-objective, familiar-strange, categories change (although not lose) meaning. In my view, any worthwhile encounter, any knowledge, cannot happen from the horizon of a fixed enclosure in a given identity *observing* an (outside) 'object': 'I' am always-already something(one) else: stranger *and* insider, local *and* distant. This "nomadic subjectivity" (Braidotti 2006a) neither identifies nor alienates: it is on the border. Hence one makes-do, experiments with what positionality allows to best map the field according to research interests.

Authors such as Becker and Faulkner (2008: 19; see also Williams 2013) argue that studying things as insiders "offers wonderful possibilities for data gathering not open in the same way to outsiders"[69]. Knowing the local dialect allowed me to understand what

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[68] I use the term "area", instead of more defined and bounded terms like "locality" "locale" "place", or institutional boundaries (Duncan 1989; see also Paasi 1991; Amin 2002; see also Moles and Saunders 2015). This emphasises the openness and fluidity of the research setting, its relational and processual nature, ongoingly *made* by actors and habitual flows (Amin 2002; Brenner 2001; Hannerz 2006). I did not aim, in fact, at a fully-fledged "locality study" (see Massey 1991). Further, there does not seem to be a sense in which it forms a "community", meaning a space of interrelationality where people are phenomenologically and affectively "held together" (Walkerdine 2010).

[69] Even Schutz (1944: 505), although favouring the researcher-stranger position, admits that there is a "private code" that is only understandable "by those who have participated" in a common "tradition".

people told me, for instance. I could intuit things that would take much time for others to grasp and I was sometimes facilitated in posing the right questions. Common backgrounds and interests also offered chances for less hierarchical relations, as the research encounter becomes a *mutual* exploration and joint knowledge production. But familiarity sometimes made people wonder why I would ask such banal questions – things that "everybody knows" (see Becker and Faulkner 2008). Finally, I knew much and for this reason needed to make an effort not to take things for granted.

5.1.2. Person-scapes

Sampling. I was concerned with the opportunities of the economic crisis for transitions towards more sustainable livelihoods. But this did not rule out curiosity about the cases where crisis-related transitions were not clearly evident or obvious. It was equally interesting to investigate change as *lack* of change. This framing left me open regarding participants' 'profiles': work redundancy without energy transitions; efforts to sustainable living without direct impact by the crisis; negative impacts from the recession *and* re-definition of life priorities towards sustainability; no crisis-related impact and no change in environmentally-relevant practices. Needless to say, this simplistic matrix, applied to life circumstances, becomes more complicated. But precisely because I wanted to have a sense of complexity and variability, I aimed at maximum variation (see Lincoln and Guba 1985). I set myself an ideal number of 10 case studies to be conducted between December 2015 and June 2016[70]. This is in line with sociologists of everyday life's suggestions to "work with a few" in order to be close to life itself (Neal 2015: 993).

Making connections and alliances. Recruitment was complicated by the rather intrusive design of my study. I circulated a flyer[71] through social media, newsletters and hard copies around the town and neighbouring areas (see Appendix B1, B2); I was also helped by a local newspaper[72], who agreed to publish an online article. In these communications I made clear that I was conducting a multimedia study on the relationship between the economic crisis and environmental sustainability; I also introduced the fact that the research would involve me participating in people's everyday

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[70] Fieldwork was actually completed at the end of August 2017.

[71] I am grateful to my dear friend Silvia who designed one for me.

[72] Il Quindicinale, via Oggi Treviso, whom I sincerely thank as well. The article can be accessed at the following link: http://www.oggitreviso.it/mi-vuoi-fare-da-cavia-120613 [last accessed 03/05/2018]

activities but that the terms were flexible and would be agreed during a preliminary encounter. With a mixture of purposive, opportunistic and snowballing strategies[73] (Flick 2013; Miles and Huberman 1991). I recruited ten participants of very different ages, economic and social backgrounds, life trajectories[74]. Five of them lived in town, five out of it. All of them had more or less frequent contacts with the town. In the process through which I recruited people, or they recruited me, a diagram started to generate; horizontal relationships established in a cross-contamination of acquaintances and kinships. Seen from the perspective of this intricate diagram, 'the' town of Vittorio Veneto came out to exist as an in-between space with other extra-municipal areas: adjoining valleys, villages, towns. A shared territory, an intensive point of circulation: things, bodies, desires; a site of ongoing material, affective, semiotic and political engagement; the interesting point of common geographies (see Ingold 2011).

Ethical issues. Upon encountering prospective participants, I explained in detail what the research would entail, discussed with them details and suitable arrangements, presented an information sheet (Appendix B3) where I stated the aim and modality of the study. Both in speech and in the information sheet it was made clear that they were free to withdraw at any moment, as well as to change dates and times agreed. I also put every effort in creating a sense of openness to communication and negotiation regarding my presence or possibly uneasy situations. On the designated day of fieldwork, I asked participants to sign an informed consent sheet (Appendix B4) after making sure they did not have any questions or worries about the study's conduct. Yet, participants were many more than ten, and not only in the sense that each person is a multiplicity. Within anyone's everyday life many other people are present – spouses, children, acquaintances, friends, desired lovers, mothers, fathers, brothers… Since my study supposedly involved "my" participants, none of them signed informed consent. This testifies to the insufficiency of a bureaucratised model of informed consent: qualitative research involves such unexpected circumstances that beforehand informed consent cannot be but *one* part of the

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[73] Jordan (2006) warns that this type of recruitment presents problems in terms of self-selection of people who choose to participate; this would lead to potential biases, especially related to class since the middle-classes are expected to participate more readily. Yet, this study did not aim at statistical representativeness and therefore self-selection can be seen as useful data in itself rather than a source of biases. Indeed, I observed that the so-called middle classes were *hardest* to contact and engage. Although only tentatively, this fact might suggest us something about the classed nature of interests in ecology – supporting Alier's (2002) hypothesis of the "environmentalism of the poor".

[74] I refrain from providing participants' 'profiles' on purpose: to avoid individualisation and fixing an identity for them.

negotiation of a researcher’s presence (Miller and Bell 2007; Pink 2002; Mulhall 2002). According to a more context-specific and reflexive approach to ethics, consent and access were therefore adjusted step by step with all participants, including those who had signed the forms.

5.1.3. Time-scapes

Time is an important dimension of the everyday. The actions, practices, gestures, affective qualities of people’s daily uses of energy change according to natural as well as social rhythms and iterations. How to get a sense of everyday energy assemblages as constituted through repetition *and* difference within and along these cycles? The constraints of the study did not allow engagement with participants across the year, with its changing seasons. And given the centrality of this kind of cycle to uses of energy, we are certainly reminded of the contingency of my observations. What *was* possible to participate in, at least to a certain extent, were daily rhythms. For this reason, I asked participants to spend an entire day with me. Such a choice allowed me to construct a significantly rich everyday-assemblage, without the strain of prolonged presence (Emerson et al. 2011)[75]. The definition of time-scapes nonetheless emerged within encounters and adapted to participants’ needs and habits[76]. We should nonetheless bear in mind that the neat slices of fieldwork time do not exhaust the temporalities that inhabit people’s everyday lives, for at any moment our presents reach back to the past and forward to the future (Walkerdine 2010).

5.2. Ethnographies of the everyday: practice, opportunities, challenges

5.2.1. Multisensoriality, multimodality, multimediality

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[75] Ethnographic participant observation is normally associated with longer immersion within a setting and interaction with a defined social group, but it has been recently noticed that fieldwork can be articulated in different temporalities to accommodate both the researcher’s and participants’ needs. For instance, Jeffrey and Troman (2004: 538-539) suggest that observations made in a “compressed time mode” can provide a fully-fledged ethnographic “representation of a larger picture constructed over longer periods”.

[76] For instance, with busy working people the time spent together was intermittent – my body moving here and there to accommodate to the needs of the day: a bar on the way to work, my car and so on. Sometimes, participants proposed to stay with me on two half-days, so I could have a better sense of their everyday life(ves) in their different unfolding.

A banal, though often under-appreciated insight is that a promising way of approaching the everyday as complexly as it is lived is to self-consciously deploy those faculties that we normally use in *our own* daily activities and practices: *multi-sensoriality*, for instance (Atkinson et al. 2012; see also Coole and Frost 2010)[77]. Multisensorial engagement helps slow down analytical lenses and attune to the messiness and ephemerality that make up the texture of the everyday; gain a sense of *bodies*, *in process*; experience the vital, dynamic and irreducible nature of matter, avoiding reductionism (Del Busso 2011; Manley 2009; Gabb and Fink 2015). This also helps us to appreciate the *multi-modality* of the world: the fact that we produce meanings through different "abstract, non-material resources of meaning-making" such as writing, speech and images, but also gesture, facial expression, texture, size and shape, colour (Dicks et al. 2006: 82; see also Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Dicks 2014). Furthermore, there also are non-linguistic, a-signifying modes whereby bodies affect one another: a flower has its own coloury mode of affecting my eye; speech communicates through use of pitch and gestures. Modes are in turn inextricable from the concrete materials in which they are embodied, media. Hence, the importance of being attentive to *multi-mediality*, the concrete bodies and shapes that modes take, their multivocality, permeability, and interconnectivity (Dicks et al. 2005; for two examples of Deleuzian-inspired multimedia ethnographies see Renold and Mellor 2013; Lorimer 2013).

Deliberate deployment of multimodal and multimedia methodologies worked particularly well since it is "congruent with multitiered ontologies" (Coole and Frost 2010: 32). The multiplicity of (im)presence afforded by the use of different media opens more opportunities for "being a multitude": objects, subjects, human and non-human animals, plants (McKechnie and Welsh 2002). Both emphasise emerging becoming on a plane of immanence: discourses becoming-things, colours-becoming-meanings, animals-becoming-flowers… This also allows a more collaborative and engaged co-construction of research field and data (Pink 2002; Atkinson et al. 2012). Simultaneously, cameras and

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[77] This is not a straightforward practice since we are culturally habituated to selectively use the senses. In the West, there is a high propensity towards the visual field; yet, recognising that the use of vision rests on a variety of other senses opens the opportunity for other ways of engagement (Mitchell 2012; Stoller 1997). Maybe for these reasons multisensory ethnographies remain somewhat underdeveloped (Chadwick 2017). Yet, recent literature is moving in this direction, with studies of sound (Hall et al. 2008; 2012; Tacchi 2003), touch (Abruzzese 2012; Ahmed 2010), taste and smell (Pink 2012), thermoception (Vannini and Taggart 2014), etc. proliferating.

other automatic recording instruments displace the researcher's agency and question the privilege of (human) consciousness as organiser of reality because they have their own logic of functioning and 'perceiving' things that would otherwise remain in our optical unconscious (see Benjamin 2010; Renold and Mellor 2013; Deleuze 2005a).

Using a variety of senses, modes and media to engage with assemblages in more-than-phenomenological ways loses the sense of getting a more *accurate representation* of life (Mason and Davies 2009; Renold and Mellor 2013; Dicks et al. 2006; Hurdley 2007; Reavey 2011). There are even risks of data-overload, never-ending data collection, over-burdened and cumbersome analysis (Dicks et al. 2005: 118) – to the point that sensoria can be sometimes better communicated through words. Rather, the aim is to generate different, non-hierarchical, layers of data that can be deployed to express different levels of reality and their specificity, *opening up* reality through an appreciation of the clashes, inconsistencies, sheer diversities that modes entail (Coole and Frost 2010; Henwood et al. 2012; Gabb and Fink 2015; Pink 2001; contra: Hastrup 2012). The question is: what can, say, a sound tell us that words or an image cannot, and vice versa (Mason and Davies 2009)?

5.2.2. Bodies. Affects.

Now, a "sensuous" ethnography (see Stoller 1973) strongly interpellates us as *body*-researchers interested in other *bodies*. And this in turn means attentiveness to the affective and desiring aspects of experience: a "passionate sociology", one that makes itself dirty with the processes, messiness, affective texturing of the field (Boden and Williams 2002)[78]. Yet, involvement does not imply a fit between the researcher's and the participant's worlds thanks to empathy (see Pink 2002). The ways I am affected as body, in fact, is singular and strongly dependent on *this* body and its potencies. Between the researcher and the researched there is a "hyphen space" that connects but also divides (Cunliffe and Karunanayake 2013), a degree of exteriority that is both enabling and positively disabling (Candea et al. 2015; Emerson et al. 2011), a somewhat unavoidable estrangement that reminds us of the partiality of knowledge.

But if other people's lives cannot be straightforwardly and phenomenologically 'accessed' (Hurdley and Dicks 2011; Dicks 2014) – why so much attention to the body?

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[78] Admittedly, a passionate sociology is partly in contrast to the approach that Lefebvre proposed, arguing that the critique of the everyday needs alienation and estrangement on the sociologist's part (Highmore 2002; see also Neal 2015).

I agree with the scant literature on psychosocial ethnography that bodies can produce interesting data as they somehow ‘register’ experience: if researchers let events and other bodies ‘touch’ them, affects become sources of meaning and knowledge. The task is thus to map how different contexts call for specific embodied responses (Hickey-Moody 2013). But whereas much psychosocial literature refers to participants’ and researchers’ (inter-)subjective dynamics, I concentrate on assemblages of bodies, things, discourses. Relatedly, such affective (and political) evaluation does rely on my body-as-registering/resonant, but in as far as ‘I’ emerge in processes of becoming. Embodiment is thus also a way of appreciating that we are always also “not human”: continuously exposed to, and merging with, our ‘environment’ and ‘object of study’ (Manley 2009).

5.2.3. In the fields

- Participant observation

I thus entered the field with these interests. And to investigate them I deployed my body, senses, mind. I arrived at participants’ houses, met them as they were having breakfast or had just finished lunch, participated in what they were doing, if I could. Or simply watched, listened, sensed. Waited. I chatted and stayed quiet. Ate with them, went shopping, practiced sport, went to the university, waited in bars… trying to establish that normal extra-ordinary that I wanted to work with. In this process, I have been aided by a number of instruments that both captured and constructed the field itself.

Fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are probably the ethnographer’s medium *par excellence*[79]: “thick descriptions” (see Geertz 2000: 3-30), ways of remembering, making accounts and reflecting about unfolding situations; not a ‘mirror’ but ways of making sense of a messy reality, dependent on research agendas and researchers’ positionality. This I have not only recognised but also valued as contribution to later analysis. Fieldnotes, in their versatility, have been precious: they allowed to retain impressions, practices, objects, rhythms, conversations, sensorial-affective qualities, interactional patterns. This implied a process of translation, as often a-signifying and synchronous elements needed to be put into

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[79] Interestingly, despite their centrality, fieldnotes have been little thematised as a research instrument, their popularity possibly being responsible for a historical disregard of the fundamental problems of note-taking, taken for granted as straightforward (Mulhall 2002; Wolfinger 2012).

sequences of words. One of the positive contributions of multimediality is precisely that it gives opportunities to retain such different characters of experience through other instruments.

Taking notes involves choices before, during and after participation (Emerson et al. 2011). During the days of participant observation, I used a small notebook to briefly jot down event sequences, salient events or sentences, initial impressions, words that gave a ‘sense’ of the moment and the felt situation, peculiarities and distinctive features of the research setting. To a certain extent, there always remained a certain awkwardness to the notebook, as if the very fact of having it in my hands and scribbling down something made me (self-)evident as researcher. Furthermore, it took me away from the flow of sensations and movements around me: retaining something meant losing something else. The amount of note-taking varied from time to time, depending on how much I was left alone or participants were involved in activities that I could not participate in. The notebook also became a significant object in the interaction with children: they were curious to know what I was writing and why; it also acted as a medium as they used it to play or communicate to me how they were feeling about my presence.

At home I reconstructed my day with participants in great detail. I first jotted down things, events and lists of topics as anchorage and then fleshed them out. Fieldnotes were geared to remembering things before they fade, so writing happened as soon as possible and the style tended to be outpouring rather than polished (see Emerson et al. 2011; Mulhall 2002). I wrote chronologically, trying to replay the day in my mind; but I also paused to describe people, objects, landscapes… Although my specific research interest was energy use, I wrote anything I could remember from the day (by itself a partial selection and analysis; see Wolfinger 2012). As soon as I started looking into any occurrence, in fact, there was something that fascinated me, that told me something regarding energy assemblages even when it was not straightforwardly *about* energy. Apparently irrelevant things often helped me to weave through the data and open new insights during analysis. Writing was mainly descriptive and the effort of sticking to details helped me be attentive to the ways practices and meanings were dynamically playing out. But describing affects and sensations is never neutral and already implies some kind of embodied interpretation. Some explicit analytic notes were also included as asides and commentaries, bracketed in parentheses. I recorded further pieces of reflection to be addressed during interviews, or that could help successive data production, in my notebook. The process of note taking lasted on average more than one week of full day work per case study.

Photography and video. Mainly out of practical considerations, I decided to take photographs and not videos (if not in rare cases) during the participant observation phase. First, video making requires some sort of previous arrangement about what to record, and this was not possible for a methodology-in-the-making like mine. Furthermore, decent video making requires more skills and effort than photography. Lastly, videos are more intrusive and could obstacle my involved participation to everyday practices. Photographs are more flexible and adaptable to unforeseen circumstances, less intrusive and more negotiable (see Banks 2003; Dicks et al. 2005).

Images have the convenience of rendering, immediately and simply, the visual qualities of something that it would be long, wieldy and maybe impossible to describe in words – the complex, sensuous, spatial and relational character of bodies; aesthetic, a-signifying, affective, synchronous qualities of reality (MacDougall 1997; Manley 2009; Del Busso 2011). Yet, photographs also introduce a dimension of distance. By making still what normally flows, they communicate the irreducibility of life, the stranger-ness of the researcher within the field, the impossibility of straightforwardly 'capturing' its manifold reality (DeSilvey et al. 2013). They are partial, framed, results of research interests or contextual factors (Pink 2002; Harper 2012), never simply 'windows' on the world or subjectivities (Drew and Guillemin 2014; Rose 2016). Hence, the use of the camera becomes almost performative rather than documentary, its different capacities deployed for better expressing the qualities of certain situations (e.g. blurring for giving the idea of movement). It would thus be reductive to think photographs simply as aids for memory and description (Keats 2009: 194). Although they *can* work in such ways[80], the point is to open novel ways of seeing, not having post-hoc additions to substantiate or illustrate other kinds of data (as, for instance, in Drew and Guillemin 2014; see Banks 2003; Pink 2001).

Taking photographs was also a very different process than taking fieldnotes. The latter was very systematic and aimed at almost omnivorously capturing events, sensations, dialogues, temporalities – a lonely activity of sitting in front of a computer and tapping fingers on a keypad. Photographs involve embodied co-implication in practices, affects, visions: a much more relational, contextually-driven, ephemeral, un-designed and serendipitous endeavour. There is no clear-cut rule for *when* one ought to use them, and so researcher's creativity and sensitivity are called upon: a syncretic

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[80] Indeed, through my own photographs I found out about things that were left for me in the background during observations (DeSilvey et al. 2013).

modality of being *with* and not only *in* the place, moved by affects, libidinal drives, unconscious pulls (Froggett and Hollway 2010; Bendiner-Viani 2016; Pink 2002). Especially in hindsight, I see the process of taking photographs as mainly happening in becoming-other, "zones of proximity" between my body and other bodies. Participants suggesting something to photograph or taking my camera in their hands; photographing me in strange role reversals (Banks 2003; Botticello 2016; Botticello et al. 2016)… but also me being moved by objects and events. The camera also created opportunities of interaction and sharing of interests as some people became curious of the camera or told me their photo-making stories (Pink 2001). Children were the most involved in picture taking: they asked me to use the camera, wanted to be photographed or have a look at my pictures, sometimes allowing me very interesting insights.

Once at home, images were stored, named, given some brief descriptions to aid memory of their context. A first weaving through my pictures also helped seeing, remembering and feeling differently about my day with participants. These initial reflections fed into fieldnotes or were recorded as information on the digital file.

Sounds. During my days of participant observation, with the consent of participants, I also used my audio recorder extensively, simply leaving it running. In part, this helped me reconstruct events and atmospheres. But there was a specificity to the audio recordings which made me aware, upon listening back to them, of things that would have passed unnoticed. Sounds are an often-unnoticed element of everyday life, pushed in the background of conscience until they become salient when disturbing, loud or strange (Hall et al. 2012). The recorder enhanced my sensitivity to how sounds are integral parts of the experience of places: they created "*soundscapes*" that brought to the fore unattended to but significant "noises" that give a sense of emplacement (rural or urban, prevalently silent or noisy?) and of qualities that often do not pass into consciousness but are surely felt (tranquillity and peace or unnerving overcrowdedness; lightness of being or violence) (Hall et al. 2008). Sounds also give a sense of movement and its qualities, which in turn say something about my participants and their ways of using energy, particularly through their own bodies: how do they move, how do their actions 'sound', how was I affected by this movement? Finally, certain sounds point to local culture and social context – church's bells, traffic, televisions, etc. Hence, although sounds feature less evidently than other characteristics of the field in my analysis below, they have often been an integral part of how I felt and later conceptualised everyday scenes, places, practices.

- Materialist interviewing

Including interviews following participant observation is not uncommon in ethnographic research, as they give different opportunities and affordances of knowledge, understanding and exchange. Given the intense and condensed but relatively restricted time I spent with my participants, interviews were occasions to address specific issues, questions, apparent contradictions that I could not delve into during fieldwork or occurred to my mind afterwards (see Appendix C1 for an indicative interview protocol). Ideally (but with some exceptions), interviews took place after I finished writing fieldnotes and ordering research material – most of them some 10 to 15 days after the day of observation.

Themes, aims, interests. The interview's main function within interpretive qualitative research is to elicit the meanings through which subjects make sense of the world. Nonetheless, the discussion above problematises the idea that there is 'a' subject separate from these meanings, who can 'use' them. Furthermore, assemblages of enunciation co-emerge with states of things and are traversed by an a-significant libidinal excess. The interview should therefore be concerned not only with what makes sense, but also with what *does not*; not only with words but also with affects, things, places. Psychoanalytically inclined psychosocial methods have already brought interviews' focus on elements that are conflictual, obscure and irrational, not readily available to conscience (e.g. Lertzman 2015; Hollway and Jefferson 2013). But I do not share their focus on the secrets of subject's interiorities/identities (see also Atkinson and Silverman 1997): interviews' aim has instead been to map (collective) lines of past, present and future investment as they are actualised contextually (Brown and Reavey 2014). For these reasons, they also did not take the form of long narratives 'elicited' from participants to express their putative subjectivity. They were far more dialogical, with brief exchanges pointing to the co-constructedness of their content (Hurdley 2006). I did, during the interviews, include questions about my participants' past. But this was recognised to be only the embodied precondition of present events that remain irreducible to it (Deleuze and Negri 1990; Walkerdine et al. 2013).

I therefore not only (and not mainly) tried to *make sense* during interviews. I looked for contradiction and non-sensical enunciations that would emphasise the un-closed nature of assemblages, their opportunities for becoming (Brown 2012). When I asked about things that appeared strange to me, the aim was not so much *solving* the contradictions, but rather to open them up, make them proliferate as ruptures in the accepted order of reality (Coltart and Henwood 2011). At points, my participants tried to solve and somehow "make order" in their own affects and discourses – and this was later respected and recognised in the analysis. Sometimes, nonetheless, they "stayed with the trouble" (Haraway 2016) and recognised a fundamentally multiple, complex and non-coherent nature to everyday practices and desires.

Furthermore, energy transitions fundamentally need to include and be guided by future scenarios and imaginaries as present practices always imply a propensity, pull and interest in the future (Shirani et al. 2016; see also Boschetti 2015; Fischer et al. 2012; Jolibert et al. 2014; Hagbert and Bradley 2017). I asked participants what energy futures they envisaged as realistic, but also what they *hoped* energy futures could look like. The aim was to set in motion processes of "fabulation"[81]: constructions of (new and different) social worlds and ecologies (Deleuze 2005b: 122ff.). In between the past and the future there is always a present – albeit fleeting (see Berlant 2011). Questions also addressed this dimension. I borrowed a psychoanalytic tool and asked people to free-associate about what energy is for them; I also asked more specifically how participants *make use* of energy in their daily lives, its significance. I thus connected socio-cultural meanings and their concrete deployment in the everyday. And as a concrete – practical, material and embodied – activity was designed the interview itself.

The walking interview. Interviews are known to risk creating an abstract and de-contextualised situation (Hall et al. 2008; Brown and Durrheim 2009), at odds with the rationale of my own design. The walking interview can act as a partial corrective. First, it happens through spaces and places that are not controllable. The sounds, animals, people, etc. that populate them continuously remind us of the messy and de-individualised ways in which we lead our existences. 'Noise' (literal and metaphorical) brings the everyday back in (Anderson 2004; Hall et al. 2012). Furthermore, space is made place as participants choose where to bring researchers for a walk: significant, close or 'simply' enjoyable sites where global flows are both conveyed and diffracted (Hall et al. 2012; Bendiner-Viani 2016). Secondly, the walking interview brings the body centre-stage – a multisensory one that moves, looks, watches its step, is affected by warmth or cold, needs to negotiate access onto pathways (Ingold 2011; Pink 2015). The body-in-movement helps us to de-construct 'identity' in the very process of walking while it attunes to

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[81] I use the original, as this term is translated as "story-telling" in the edition of reference (see p. xviii; see also Stenner 2017).

rhythmic physiological dynamism (Anderson 2004) and ubiquitousness of *energy use* as intrinsic to bodily vitality. Finally, it helps building different relationships between researcher and researched (Anderson 2004; Brown and Durrheim 2009): we need to be collaborative in walking – decide where to go, how long the walk will be, attune bodies. We also look in the same, new and unforeseen, direction: together and ahead instead of each one 'inside' the other; becoming-other down a line of flight instead of territorialising selves.

Many participants were happy about the walking interview, as they could bring me to places they liked, magical or significant. It became the opportunity to breathe some air, take time out of commitments, discover new places. It was not always possible, nonetheless, to walk and the final choice was up to participants. Only in this way did I realise that the walking interview does not fit everybody. In two cases it was a deliberate decision not to walk: the youngest of my participants, Chiara, telling me that she preferred to stay still, at home, because in that way she could better articulate her thoughts[82]. And then the case of Onurbio, with whom I had been walking for more than two hours across a golf course and preferred to talk sitting on a terrace, drinking a beer and just contemplating the landscape[83]. At other times, other things were 'choosing' on our behalf: family commitments, the lack of nearby pleasant places to walk (Erika); the weather – heavy rain (Mirko and Elisa) or excessive warmth (Alberta); the body itself – surgically implanted metal plaques, pains, faulty knee joints[84].

Uses of media I: photo-elicitation. Multimodality and multisensoriality, hence salvaged, were complemented by multimediality. At the end of participant observations, I asked my participants to send me or bring along a couple of images that, for them, represented 'energy'. I willingly left this request open, as I wanted to give them as much space as possible for creative appropriation of the topic. It was a form of both *photo-*

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[82] I think this is telling of the ways she performs her identity both to other people and to herself: being rational, dis-embodied, coherent, not letting things slip into her life without them being (rationally) evaluated. A need of fixity and control that rejects the becoming nature of walking – being taken over by moment, by affects and things that just happen to be.

[83] Here in the open, though, there was not much closure to 'the environment' as such: not only was its beauty a constitutive part of the conversation; it also literally burst into the interview, as we shall see.

[84] This was the case of Manuela, who, significantly, *did* come and walk with me (and the dog and the husband) for a while, but needed to go back soon because walking is effortful for her. She brought her body up to the intensity of a threshold and stopped at its limit, in search for 'her' sustainability of walking (see Braidotti 2006b).

elicitation[85] (see Banks 2003 for general introduction; Harper 2002 for a history/review of the method) and photo production[86] (see Reavey 2011; Radley 2012; Pink 2002; Henwood et al. 2012; Butler et al. 2014; Drew and Guillemin 2014; Allen 2015; Collier 2001), helpful for enriching the interview and generate different kinds of data. Images are also increasingly 'natural' tools, since nowadays more and more people use them for communicating and understanding the world[87]. They became a starting point for the interview; they allowed participants to articulate "energy" autonomously and helped making the interview more symmetrical by shifting the focus to participants' views and imaginaries, moralities and meanings (Reavey 2011; Pink 2002).

It was also an opportunity to connect in more concrete ways with such an invisible and elusive element as 'energy' is. Through images, material and discursive elements become 'one in a web' and emphasise the situatedness and sensuousness of experiences, bringing to the fore the a-significant elements that tend to be otherwise hidden by the "imperialism of language" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 65-67; Edwards and Holland 2013; Del Busso 2011; Reavey 2011). Furthermore, they can bring in what is not present: past and/or distant objects and events (Keats 2009; Shirani et al. 2016; Henwood 2018). Producing accounts about images also evidences their ambiguous and polysemic nature, the un-closure of reality (Henwood et al. 2011). As such, more than an activity of meaning-making and sense-giving, using images is a way of rupturing the coherence of

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[85] Pink (2002) argues that the concept of "elicitation" is problematic, since she rightly argues that it is not the case that a photo "triggers" some pre-existing thought. Rather, photos are *used* to generate knowledge and investigate meanings. As such, they are more like bridges and reference points for creative dialogue. I agree with this objection but retain the phrase out of convenience.

[86] It is common practice in similar instances to give cameras to participants on the grounds of giving equal access to this practice (see Shirani et al. 2016). Nonetheless, during the ethnographic phase of the study I could make sure that all of my participants had and were able to use photo-making devices of some kind; therefore, buying a further device to give them would have been wasteful. Furthermore, photo production was not an essential or extremely central aspect of the research design. It was rather considered as a facilitator of the interview: giving a camera would have made this task more pressing and almost compulsory. It would have also framed the activity as about *taking photographs*. Yet, participants were asked to provide images, which could be of any kind (indeed, many used images found on the internet). Some did not provide any image, which was in itself interesting: being unable to provide images was a result of (and way of expressing) confusion and uncertainty as to what I meant in saying 'energy'; or of my research interests being overridden by other commitments and priorities (two women, significantly mothers of young children, confessed they had forgotten about my request); or the result of some deliberate decision.

[87] Indeed, during fieldwork, participants often used images to communicate things that were not easy to describe in words.

linear narratives and chronology, bringing in the unexpected, deterritorialising assemblages of enunciation (especially those that inform researchers' perspectives) (Pink 2002; Del Busso 2011; Brushwood Rose and Low 2014).

Uses of media II: video-making and recording. Interviews were fully recorded, so that both the conversation and wider soundscapes were captured (Hall et al. 2008, 2012). In this context, I also used videos to retain a sense of the moving bodies and landscapes unfolding during the interview-walk. This practice was somehow experimental and developed as I went along. But filming proved challenging. In one case, it helped me to establish interaction with a participant[88]. But generally speaking, I realised that the simple fact of holding the camera in my hands while conversing with people put a something in-between, which to a large extent created occlusions and blockages in the flow of the dialogue and of my thoughts. Furthermore, although interested not only in landscapes but also in the bodily movements and expression of my participants, whenever I endeavoured to film them directly I had the feeling that this would make them feel uncomfortable (Pink 2002). The result was certainly a rather clumsy (and decreasing) use of the camera, producing brief clips of sometimes bad quality – although some of these *are* expressive of situations, events and affects and have been helpful in analysing interview material.

Conversations were transcribed in full from the audio recording, with references to the relevant video material (see Appendix C2 for transcription conventions). I was aware of the crucial role that transcription holds for silencing or evidencing affects, bodily energy and embodiment, and therefore the need to critically reflect on this practice (Chadwick 2017). Although their complexity and difficulty for non-specialists prevented me from using elaborated notations, I did note pauses, voice pitch, emphases and the like. This, and the fact that the interviews were few and transcribed by me (which afforded quite specific memories of the quality of voice), helped retain the sense of the affective-libidinal intensity of talk.

5.2.4. Ethics in Place

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[88] Valerio had brought along his own video camera, which he had talked to me about during the day together, and he filmed me as I was filming him; artistically experimenting with the infra-red rays of his cameras to get some footage of me in the night "like a spectre".

The research is an *encounter* (see also Goffman 2012) that produces a contingent, though certainly not un-real, assemblage; ‘we’ co-emerge in the field and become ourselves fields (Braidotti 2002; Pink 2012). This deeply impacts on ethical considerations. The ideal of a universally valid ‘code’ of ethical conduct becomes untenable as we recognise reality to be dynamically emergent. Acknowledging our active place in research assemblages makes us doubly “accountable” not only “for ourselves as locations” (Kristmundsdottir 2006: 171) but also for the *effects* that we have in the field and beyond. Although energy use is not perceived as a sensitive topic, in practice it has to do with a whole life, and this requires tact (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). Ethics is first of all an (embodied) attentiveness to, and response-ability for, what processes of becoming do to ‘us’ and ‘the field’; a commitment to cultivate good encounters while working creatively through the sorrowful affects that at times inevitably arise (see Deleuze 2013; Haraway 2016; Braidotti 2006b; Clarke and Hoggett 2009; Frosh and Baraitser 2008; Beedell 2009).

Feminist literature talks about an ethics of care: contextual, relational, sensitive to dilemmas, aware of power differentials and committed to avoid hierarchies by respecting minor as much as major voices and bodies: children and adults, men and women, participants and ourselves (for ethics in the family see: Harden et al. 2010). An ethics of care is also about granting participants influence on setting construction (Edwards and Mauthner 2012) and “holding” them in a safe place, exercising compassion (Hollway and Jefferson 2013: 164) – something I surely found myself doing. Nonetheless, being care-ful should also make us aware that distancing and detaching are equally at work and need to be respected, even cultivated. “Rapport” is not straightforwardly positive; participants may not be willing to enter empathetic or profound relationships with us, may not need us to “hold” their emotions (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). Clashes, awkward feelings, bad encounters, and the like are positive reminders of our *irreducibility* and challenge the researcher’s allegedly ‘superior’ position.

Indeed, supposed power differentials within the research encounter should not be overestimated or taken for granted. The researcher is not always invested with importance, authority or greater capacity to deal with intractable emotions and ethical dilemmas (Jordan 2006; Bussell 1994). Being a young researcher with older participants, for instance, often implied they would treat me kindly as a ‘child’ with limited experience of life. Being non-vegan meant that I was a morally lesser, even “stupid”, person in the eyes of my vegan participants. At other times yes, I would be involved in becomings (events) where power, experience and knowledge faded in the background in favour of the *now* of a making or discovery. What was important was the affect-effect between me and participants, cultivating an openness that could make me aware of it. It was surely a tentative approach, with no easy answers – especially as I was myself *part* of the libidinal tensions of the field, taken over by surging enthusiasms, touched by feelings of contempt, drawn in more or less sympathetic intimacies. But participant observation contributed to develop a research ethics that was as open and respectful of difference as possible, with participants actively participating in the co-construction of the field and having the "opportunity to reflect on often unconscious patterns"[89] (Jordan 2006: 171).

Throughout analysis, ethics meant refraining from imposing pre-determined schemas on the aliveness of these livelihoods. I did nonetheless reach further than the contingency of assemblages: from the global flows of capital to the utopias of different worlds. This was also part of my ethical stance: going beyond immediacy to open the field. Yet to the extent that I did this, the effort was to be convivial: opening up instead of closing down, flowing instead of fixing, reaching out instead of reaching in, make a rhizome and not a tree, smoothening instead of striating the surface of 'my' assemblages. It is now time to see how I tried to do this.

5.3. Analytical strategies

A view of social research as construction implies that any phase is already a quasi-analysis, made of selective decisions, framings and productive directionality. I call 'analysis' the process of explicitly and methodically weaving through data in order to produce conceptual insights (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). I mainly concentrated on fieldnotes, interview transcripts, photographs and images. Some attention was also given

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[89] Participants expressed time and again that the research encounter was an opportunity for self-reflection. I would not call my research design "participatory" in the sense this is understood in current literature (i.e. engaging in active and purposeful ways with people to effect a desired change; see e.g. Chilvers and Kearnes 2015). Participatory research is now becoming more and more fashionable as it is understood as defecting the boundaries and supposed hierarchies between researcher and researched; and also as a way to challenge the illusion that research can be 'external' and objective. As such, it has the potential for becoming a very "convivial" (Illich 1973) research methodology (see also Seremetakis 1993). It is not necessarily the case, though, that it is privileged in this. That a research process may have democratically transformative effects depends on the ways social scientists position within, *and affect*, the field. Indeed, a research design that is not strictly 'participatory' might be more democratic that one superficially involving people in the process of implementation of a pre-given set of aims.

to video clips. Sound recordings were not listened back to in this phase; yet, auditory insights did feature in transcriptions and fieldnotes.

In ethnography, both textual and visual data analysis mostly includes the practice of coding. Codes aim at ‘identifying’ themes or patterns that, according to the instructions of grounded theory (e.g., in energy research, Hargreaves 2011), are then grouped into hierarchies. Concepts emerge from iterative interaction with data so theory building is inductive. Emphasis lays on analytical saturation, coherence, closure and inter-researcher consistency: despite acknowledging the contingency of emerging accounts, researchers are concerned that analysis is a correct and reliable reflection of existing patterns, not a ‘mere’ construction of the analyst (MacLure 2013a). Recently and also thanks to the advent of new technologies, social scientists have increasingly called for different analytical sensitivities, concerned with expressing the situatedness of interpretation and the complexity of the social (see e.g. Dicks et al. 2005; Charmaz and Henwood 2008).

Post-constructionist scholarship is in line with these calls and challenges the assumption that “[a]nalysis … is a search for pattern and meaning” (Collier 2001: 35). One seeks to respect the complexity of data, its excesses, its contradictions, things that *do not* make sense. Data become somehow estranged from the analyst, who recognises their potency to affect and the alterity that cuts through them and makes them irreducible to manipulatory knowledge (Jackson and Mazzei 2012; Martin and Kamberelis 2013). Yet, this is not necessarily an outright rejection of the practice of coding *per se* but rather a rearticulation of it. Coding produces the tracings that highlight the structuring of reality (see also Dicks 2014). What is important is that work does not stop here, that one is attentive and open to the “wonder” of that which is not reducible to codes (MacLure 2013a). Attending to *affect* is important because it points to the virtual (Olsson 2009): ‘glowing data’, intensive points, signal the singularity of *events* and moments of subjectification (MacLure 2013b; see Deleuze and Negri 1990; Deluze and Parnet 2007).

In what follows, I give an overview of how I approached the task of mapping data. It was indeed a nomadic process, enacted through an intense and affective (as much as thoughtful) engagement with data. It involved both method, repetition, orderliness *and* intuition, difference, messiness. Theories and philosophies acted as enablers of vision and positive contributions to open up linkages with those “relevant political, institutional and cultural discourses and structures” that there is a danger of missing when we “become so involved with the minutea of interactions and relations” (Jeffrey and Troman 2004: 545): they were not used as pre-given explanations about patterns of reality but as an instrument of emic and etic research at once (Henwood et al. 2008). It was a processual, data driven, approach, while I let myself be taken into a movement of double-capture with the data themselves – a matter of becoming, in which neither 'me' nor the data nor 'thoughts' remained quite the same.

5.3.1. Text-based material

As an entry point in the analysis of data, I started coding through the program NVivo in search for patterns and some order – and the help of tools such as searches and code-retrieval. After a few days of work, nonetheless, I felt frustrated by this practice and overwhelmed by a sense of pointlessness, boredom and lack of interest in what I was doing. Not that the data themselves were boring – quite the contrary: they were so rich that I felt this kind of practice could not produce even the pale image of that complexity. There was a sense, as well, of being 'called' by the data to a closer and more embodied-affective relationship – which my degree of technological proficiency did not allow me. I decided to give up NVivo, but not coding.

I printed my material and started reading as closely as possible, helping myself with four highlighters of different colours and a black pen. Yellow signalled 'energy use' in general (almost all of my data are yellow-signed). Green was for 'ecological' (practice, discourse, affect). Pink was life, joy, creativity and vitality. Blue pointed to sorrow, closure, death. These colours intermingled, meshed, composed – and attribution was less than straightforward. The highlighters had the practical function of helping me go back to the texts, spotting potentially relevant passages, giving me a visual idea of what happens in the text: are the energy assemblages sustainable or unsustainable? what affects do they inspire me? is there a correlation between the colours? In this activity, my sensitivity and affectivity were central. Quite disillusioned regarding the possibility of factoring them out, I embraced my positionality as method, let my own affects tell me something about how energy assemblages were working[90].

On the margins (and in annexed pieces of paper, as margins were never enough despite being wide) I scribbled codes of all kinds, ranging from 'appliance' and 'tradition' to 'education', 'know-how', 'technology', to the point of losing a sense of how many they

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[90] Notably, this departs from the majority of psychoanalytically inclined ways of treating analysts' subjectivities. Cartwright (2004) proposes that we, as researchers, need to work through our unconscious motivations reflexively, so that we can recognise our biases and cultivate objectivity. Others use transference and counter-transference to uncover the intersubjective 'secrets' of interactions (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2005). These stances are clearly at odds with a post-representational approach.

were. I also added comments, things I found significant, trajectories, possible interpretations and a great deal of circling and underlining. Codes concretised recurrences within and across cases pointing to co-emergence and co-presence: the collective nature of micro assemblages. Codes were the signs of repetition and a repetitive task for me to carry out. But *difference* spurs from repetition (Deleuze 1997; see also Jackson and Mazzei 2012): novel insights and new codes emerge. I could realise how much each reality is singular, always slightly un-reducible (or differently reducible) to the codes developed elsewhere. Hence, coding brought about its own *de*codification: data telling me they were not going to stick to whatever I had in mind. I did not generate any trees or super-ordained codes that would group 'sub'-codes. I refrained from producing these hierarchies because I wanted object-codes, sign-codes, event-codes, etc. to make a "rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 3ff.).

The comments on the margin were memoranda, possible interpretations, questions. They were inspired by theory but always exceeded it as I moved through that huge and heavy book of stories. The richness and complexity of reality imposed itself, so that I needed to also rely upon *intuition* as method, as a way of mapping division and convergence of reality (Deleuze 2001). This also has something to do with the free association that is typical of psychoanalytic insights (Cartwright 2004), and not by chance: a nomadic analysis needs to be concerned with the unconscious as a collective process of contingent, disparate and always emergent association. In this, a practice of self-de-territorialisation (rather than reflexivity) needed to be put in motion to avoid the research process entering self-perpetuating loops of interpretation and confirmation of data (see Parker 2015).

5.3.2. Images

My own photographs and the images that my participants chose or produced were analysed after texts' analysis. This has surely influenced the ways I looked at them. But visual analysis was also a way of changing analytical lenses, rupturing an established routine (Bendiner-Viani 2016). Whereas text-based material prompted me to analyse assemblages in terms of case studies, images suggested links across them. Furthermore, they made me more sensitive to objects, places, elements and things. As images are ways of constructing reality (Buckingham 2012; Reavey 2011), they have something (less and more) of the affective qualities that I experienced in certain situations. Even the lack of photographs told me something about affective states – a strong involvement in some activity that absorbed my attention or, on the contrary, an affective blankness and detachment. As such, one of the correlatives of the analysis of my own photographs was a sort of auto-ethnography through which I retraced but also discovered (and re-created) the field experience (see Bridger 2011).

Building a coherent and systematic approach to visual analysis was not easy. Visual sociology is an established field of research; nonetheless, most well-defined methods for data analysis are concerned with *meaning*: what meanings do images or the objects they contain convey[91] (Drew and Guillemin 2014; Brushwood-Rose and Low 2014). Yet, I believe that one of the interests of multi-modality and multi-mediality is precisely their capacity to address *both* signification *and* those aspects that defy signification (Savedoff 2012). I thus needed to experiment and let myself be inspired by Deleuze's (2005a; 2005b) reflections on cinema[92]. By approaching my photographs through the lenses of these texts, I was positioned in rather peculiar ways: as director and critic. I started to ask them: what kind of affects-effects was the camera (as an eye *within* matter: see Deleuze 2005a), often despite or irrespective of my deliberate decisions, capturing of the field? and: to what extent can I become editor of the images and put them to work? Interest thus went beyond mimetic concerns, towards creation, expression, generativity, affective mobilisation (Pink 2002; Botticello 2016). Photographs functioned in conjunction or diffraction with textual or language-based material to open up novel insights (Pink 2002; DeSilvey et al. 2013).

5.3.3. Concluding remarks: data, interpretation and participation

I asked myself to what extent would it be the case to feed my analysis back to participants. This practice is often understood as one of validation: gaining confirmation of the validity of analysis, its correct 'interpretation' of reality. But my approach cherishes *difference* over convergence – despite not preventing empirical analysis from looking for

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[91] In particular, these are social semiotics (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; 2001; Dicks 2014; see also Mitchell 2012) and thematic analysis (see e.g. Gleeson 2011). Simplifying a bit, we might notice that the latter is at odds with a "diffractive" analytical method (Barad 2003). Social semiotics, on their part, although very influential and useful to ethnographic practice (e.g. Dicks et al. 2006), addresses the ways in which meaning-making is accomplished in social environments through the use of a range of modes (e.g. visual, tactile, linguistic, etc.). It is thus only partially appropriate to a post-representational approach.

[92] It might seem somewhat illegitimate to draw upon theories of cinema for analysing still images. Yet, my analytical approach was not one of philological appropriateness but creative insight (see Taylor 2013).

connection with the reality in which it originates. Whenever I had doubts about my own analyses or were not sure about data, I went back to my participants. There is also an ethical sense to this: the effort to democratise the research process, opening my own constructions to further deconstruction. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) oppose this opportunity: they argue that defences and anxiety would make participants react in negative ways to the analyses and reject them. This stance appears to me rather defensive on the part of researchers themselves, who seem unprepared to open their own interpretations to different insights. Nonetheless, I agree on the fact that feeding analysis back to participants needs not be a programmatic and systematic practice. Final analyses, with their academic jargon and degree of specialisation, can re-instate, instead of flattening, hierarchies; they might also be unwanted. Differently, giving personalised or general simple reports to everybody could simplify the complexity of the field and 'fix' it in a given form. Decisions on how far, and what, to report back have therefore been contextual, informal, responsive to participants' desires and curiosity.

5.4 (Post)-representational issues: writing

Once 'representation' as a scientific category is problematized, writing also needs to be reconceptualised: no longer a reporting of analysis, it becomes part and parcel of it. A few issues are of interest: (a) how to think writing in relation to its 'outside' without incurring in the binary logic of representation, but also without falling into the opposite trap of collapsing knowledge and reality; (b) how to avoid the practice of writing being a tracing activity solely – leaving it open to becoming; (c) how to avoid the "colonisation" of non-significant aspects of experience by language. Without clear-cut 'recipes' for responding to these challenges, the endeavour becomes a matter of strategies and, surely, of style (Carboni 2014).

One possible way is adopting a patchy and impressionistic writing, in which the contingency of the scene, its momentary affects, its sensory qualities, etc. are conveyed in open vignettes that aim at *affecting* the reader through intensity rather than providing a pre-fabricated conceptual closure and explanation – as is the case with Stewart's (2007) *Ordinary Affects*[93]. The danger with this approach is two-fold. First, although evidencing

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[93] This is a notable and relevant example of writing inspired by Deleuzian-Guattarian theorisations. The book has the aim of evidencing how the everyday and its politics are made significant through affects. It is made of an "assemblage" of almost palpable

the partiality of the argument, even an impressionistic vignette favours a very specific interpretation/affection – but this non-neutrality risks to slip in the background. Secondly, in looking for potency, writing becomes sometimes self-referential and less intelligible. In other kinds of post-qualitative texts, there is a specular danger: despite claims to affectivity and materiality-embodiment, writing remains too heavily theoretical, or its jargon too specialised, to move bodies (Greene 2013). These issues might imply that a book fails to assemble with its outside and is thwarted in its critical/emancipatory aims.

We are thus reminded that one should be careful not to diminish and disregard thought and conceptualisation in favour of affects[94] but also that affects should not be colonised by heavy conceptualisation. Working within a flat ontology means recognising their equal stance but also their irreducibility and peculiar affordances (Cerrato 2013). This observation guided my own writing: affecting through a vivid narration of the concrete and contingent (see DeSilvey et al. 2013); bringing this micro-level to bear on visions of the 'macro' level of social processes via conceptualisation. Thought has this potentiality for critique *beyond* what is given in the here-and-now; creating novel problems and questions (Deleuze 1997). I also looked for intelligibility at all levels but without reduction of the world to something describable by rational categories[95]. Certainly, this has created tensions: philosophical concepts needed to be juxtaposed to affectively charged, fleeting, words that try to retain vivacity of lived experience (Hollway 2009); orderly argumentation is sometimes ruptured by the impetuosity of images. With this tension, I tried to express how much my own thought and affects were continuously territorialised, deterritorialised and reterritorialised in and through encounters. My stylistic ambivalence and "baroque" (see Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 338) style are therefore deliberate. And yet, I hope they will be approachable as something

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fragments, pieces of stories, reflections that aim at communicating their immanence to the scene. They do not seek analytic closure but rather to make the reader attend to something significant happening. Scenes are recounted in third person, to emphasise the difference between the subject of lived experience and the one who writes.

[94] Surrendering to the affective here-and-now would indeed be particularly functional to the perpetuation of a system like contemporary capitalism that precisely on the immersion in an un-mediated perpetual present founds its driving "logic" (Jameson 1991). The distance between Deleuze and Guattari's thought and this "post-qualitative" tendency to surrender to a (paradoxically, hyperconceptualised) immediacy of affect is encapsulated in the famous and critical remark by Deleuze and Guattari (2000: 240) that "capitalism is profoundly illiterate".

[95] More than with Stewart's (2007), my effort is in line with Seremetaki's (e.g. 1993) ethnographic engagement with rural Greece in the context of modernization.

that wants to be read, communicate and passionately argue with the reader (see Simon 2013).

Writing has been an integral part of the analysis, for the need to make decisions on how and what to include have also produced many of my visions on data. I decided to maintain separate, to a certain extent, the case studies in order to give a sense of their singularity. Nonetheless, it was also clear that a coherent, closed and exhaustive narrative about each was neither possible nor desirable. Since change and transitions are one of the main objects of this study, it came rather natural to organise the analysis chapter in trajectories of *becoming*. In this, I was partially led by the intensity of the data and of my experience: by focussing on significant practices, objects, memories, events, I located potential movements towards different relationships with ecologies (see Di Masso and Dixon 2015). Depending on the data, any one case-as-person has been treated either in one unified section or diffracted across more than one. Although their intermeshing is always singular, lines are also collectively shared and intersect across cases and across trajectories. To a certain extent, I have explicitly woven their relations throughout analysis, but I also leave the reader to construct links. In the final chapter I do so more explicitly.

In line with the idea of an ethnographic and immersive approach, in which analysis and conceptualisation emerge from experience, I rely extensively on 'raw data': words and still images. They work differently, but on the same plane, because of their media-specificity: images affect in more punctual and less signifying ways, words describe and give a sense of process; they sometimes contradict each other. For images, I have almost always avoided to use captions, which territorialise in advance the visuality of the image to the signification of language (Banks 2003; Hurdley 2007; Pink 2002). I gave them a number only when necessary for reference throughout the text. To emphasise the mutual embeddedness of data and argument, I decided not to use inverted commas whenever I cited participant's words or extracts of fieldnotes in-text. Nonetheless, I also wanted to maintain their otherness with respect to analytical elaboration, giving a sense of them as words spoken from somewhere else. Hence, I differentiated these data by presenting them in *italics*. In the next chapter, therefore, *italics* should not be taken as emphasis but as referral. Sometimes, italicised text will contain inverted commas: these are verbatim transcriptions of my own fieldnotes, where participants' talk also features. Emphasis will be <u>underlined</u>. I purposefully talk about 'my' affects, to expresses the contingency and embeddedness of my representation-constructions of reality. Such wealth of data has not the aim of 'illustrating' or giving credence to my arguments: extracts and images were the rich bearers of those intensities that spurred my own conceptualisations; they lead thought; I worked *with* rather than upon them (see Simon 2013). Not by chance, many of the sections begin with a piece of data: this is how I proceeded – to think, but beginning from an intensity.

Despite its originalities, the analysis chapter is organised rather traditionally, as a flow of text with images in between, sometimes punctuated by footnotes addressing lines that emerge as I write and yet do not find their place within the space of a linear narrative. There is no doubt that the affordance of hypertext and hypermedia would to a large extent contribute to a post-representational research project, being a "rhizomatic" style of composition and assembly (Dicks et al 2005: 163; Vannini and Taggart 2014)[96]. Yet, producing a hyper-media output of good quality requires much time and expertise in handling computer software so that, within the bounded limits of an individual PhD research project, its potentialities could become problems: awkwardness, messiness, disproportionate effort, etc. I therefore preferred to make this multiplicity, multilinearity and multidirectionality out of familiar means.

The ethics of (not) using names. When dealing with in-depth observation and new technologies, we are faced with ethical issues regarding anonymity and confidentiality, all the more so in approaching the context of the family and home (Hollway and Jefferson 2013; Del Busso 2011; see also Drew and Guillemin 2014; Allen 2015). It is common practice to anonymise participants and make them unrecognisable throughout the data set. Nonetheless, the extent to which this is straightforwardly ethical has been questioned. Images' anonymization generates pictures of body-parts instead of people and this can also diminish their political import. It can become the automatic practice of self-disciplined researchers who no longer seek innovative and inventive relationships to data (Allen 2015). Sometimes and for different reasons, people *want* to be recognizable and recognised. Hence, there is a "call for a reorientation of debate, away from an assumption of the universal/ist ethical good of anonymity, towards a politics and ethics of the question of naming" based on a contextual approach sensitive to participants' will (Moore 2012: 331). Some of the names will be actual names, some nicknames – either invented by me or provided by participants themselves. They appear only whenever they had agreed to

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[96] Dicks et al. (2005; see also Pink 2012) recognise that hypertext and hypermedia gives the opportunity to construct multi-linear and multi-directional narratives, which defy one single interpretation and representation of the world and allow novel insights on the part of the reader. Furthermore, they help approaching each different medium as inherently valuable, resonating with everyday embodied experience.

be photographed and shown. In line with explicit requests, care has also been taken to make some places (e.g. workplaces) unidentifiable (see Banks 2003).

It is now time to turn to the analysis itself.

Chapter six

Energy assemblages in crisis. Trajectories of becoming.

This chapter is organised according to lines of (ecological) becoming that point to change and transformations happening in the context of the economic recession; a critique of late-capitalist (libidinal) economy via its everyday assemblages, a pragmatics of their territorialisations, flights and reterritorializations. I talk about what I saw, felt and heard, through putting the colourful, sensuous and dynamic unfolding of life ordered on (virtual) paper. This is certainly a practice of translation, adaptation, selection, construction: life to language. What ensues is no less real than life, though: it will have its own ways of bearing on the world. Choosing what to say and what to not say requires me to leave aside much of the wealth of the field experience. I am guided by my research question and positionality: this bundle of lines called 'I' that, as author, always lurks in the background threading the fabric of the argument – and without much control over the process. Where possible, I will point the reader to some of 'my' involvements but, as specified above, only with the aim of making the argument's partiality explicit. In the first narrative, I dwell a little more on context so that the reader might get accustomed to my presence. Let us now, without much further ado, step into the field.

6.1. First line of becoming: Becoming-poor

> *Regardless of the content one gives it, the machine [of faciality] constitutes a facial unit, an elementary face in biunivocal relation with another: it is a man* or *a woman, a rich person or a poor one, an adult or a child, a leader or a subject, "an x* or *a y".*
>
> Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 177)

Of these "elementary faces", one is minor and the other is major: posed in a hierarchy whereby the major traces the contours of the norm – the yardstick against which one measures each one's fitness and value. The poor person (like the woman, the child, the subject…) is a minor face. Marginal, cut off from virtually any socially valued practice in the widespread commodification of (rich) life. In times of crisis, this figure becomes frightening as everyone feels on the verge of becoming a poor person. The affluent society itself becomes, and is affectively experienced as, a fragile construction that can crumble at any moment to re-instate the regimes of scarcity that capitalist development claim to have overcome. The pauper is thus the "spectre" (Derrida 1994) of the rich, individual-as-owner. Yet precisely for this reason poorness can put in motion lines of flight: *becoming-poor*. As rejection of ownership and appropriation, 'poorness' is relevant to ecological transitions because it can open towards new regimes of post-material prosperity and good life.

6.1.1. Becoming-poor in a movement of dance

A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic on the analyst's couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world.
Deleuze and Guattari (2000: 2)

It's past 11 pm. Four hours ago Onurbio[97] and I set out from his house in Vittorio Veneto and drove for some 60 km, 40 minutes, to get to Mestre (Venice). Left his place, went to the pump station for petrol, entered the motorway, drove through the city suburbs and arrived at the parking space of a maybe 50-year-old, grey, big and austere building. Left the car, climbed the steps to its entrance. It's May and when we arrived it was not dark yet. Some people stood on a small terrace outside, chatting and drinking. Upon entering, Onurbio and I passed by an open-plan space organised as an informal but polished restaurant: wooden tables; shelves with bottles of natural-and-artisanal wines on show; a few plants; a bar. *It's a bit of an alternative place – the kind you like*, Onurbio commented, thus openly setting himself as a (normal) other with respect to this "osteria biosolidale"[98]: proudly molar against a molecularity where he positions me. But we were not there for eating. Leaving the osteria to our left, Onurbio and I walked through the big room and entered another room, far less charming and cozy: neon lights, a huge de-personalised and almost empty space, no windows. Colours also changed a lot: from the natural-looking cream-white and wood to artificial grey, white, red. Onurbio comes here once a week, every week, to help a local teacher run a tango course. Classes start at 8:30 pm and last about one hour; after that, the space becomes a "milonga": anyone can come and practice tango. We arrived early, in line with Onurbio's care for timing and precision. We settled our things on one of the tables along the walls and Onurbio went to the other side of the room, carrying a leather case where he keeps equipment for playing music. He connected his iPod to the speakers and checked everything was working.

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[97] Nickname chosen by the participant.

[98] "Osteria biosolidale" is a strange phrase. It combines the contemporary 'organic' and 'fairtrade' healthy-and-green elitist culinary fashion on the one hand and, on the other, the 'osteria': what used to be a low-brow type of bar where people would gather to play cards, swear and drink cheap wine. We were literally passing through an increasingly popular trend of the area (and beyond): responding to the standardisation of globalised consumer society through the establishment of 'alternative' (whatever this means) consumption spaces that re-enliven locality and traditions with a modern, ecological, twist.

Onurbio is not a tango teacher. He is (or, better, was) a ski-boots designer. He was involved in tango teaching (as assistant) only a few months ago, and only after losing his job[99]. A female teacher is formally in charge of the course, but it is him who leads the class: chooses the choreography to teach, explains the movements, corrects the students. *She has been teaching for a long time, but now she is a bit tired… so I am trying to bring some* *life* *to her classes*, he told me earlier. This is part of his approach to tango: people need to *enjoy* it. And it is also in line with his approach to life itself: dynamism, efficacy, doing things 'properly', enjoying. In the white-lit room, a few people formed a rough circle around him, their eyes following his movements, their ears his voice. He stood centre stage, his well-formed body upright; moved fluidly, talked in a confident pitch… He looked like he was enjoying him(as)self ---- a subtle indulgence. A woman was missing, so – knowing from Onurbio that I can dance – the teacher asked me to participate in the class. I became his student for an hour, unfortunately with a man who was all but exciting to dance with. Time passed slowly, as I accommodated my body to the clumsiness of my partner. Other people started to arrive: it was almost time for the milonga. I felt relieved. But then, the embraces of new dancers profoundly tired me.

It's past 11 pm. The dance is interrupted because of the deejay's birthday. As commonly happens in these occasions, she is invited by different men in turn to dance in the middle of the room while the others sit and watch. Onurbio comes and sits with me, already committed to go home. But first, he takes my camera in his hands[100].

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[99] His work trajectory follows historical developments of the North East. He started working for a medium-small firm, family-owned and characterised by low levels of technological development; he then found employment for a bigger French brand which, having absorbed an industry in the same area, owned a branch there. He left his job for chasing a new opportunity in a smaller firm. This, nonetheless, did not manage to face the ensuing decline of skiing equipment consumption. Such a phenomenon was due to the 2008 economic crisis, the increasing use of equipment rental and to the 'snow crisis'. Onurbio, quite like the small-to-medium model of enterprise typical of the North East, was made redundant at the crossroads of economic recession, climate change and globalisation. His work 'failure' is the failure of a whole economy, global and local: fierce industrialisation that, at any scale, is responsible for its own decline due to its side-effects, notably environmental degradation (see Gorz 1980).

[100] Among other things, in fact, Onurbio is passionate about photography. He took courses and went to photography trips to refine his abilities. His arms, hands, eyes and brain are far more attuned to the camera machine than are mine. In a skilful process of coming-together of his body-brain and the camera, he managed to express an affective quality of the situation that I would have not been able either to represent or to conceptualise without his photos.

Figure 1

Figure 1: the Onurbio-camera assemblage takes a shot of the ballroom dance: people sitting along the walls, tables and chairs, the wooden floor, the dim lights… In the middle of the room, two people in an embrace, dancing. In this "image-movement" (Deleuze 2005a), movement is expressed by giving clear and neat form to what is not supposed to be moving: relatively stable space coordinates are maintained; fixed objects emphasise the movement of the two bodies that, embraced, dance. Dancers lose contours and consistency: their bodies mesh, twist. This visualisation of movement indirectly introduces in the image the variable of *time*. But because time is, above all, change and transformation, we might say that the image-movement (indirectly) expresses the openness of becoming inherent to reality, its unbounded-ness[101]. We might say that this photograph captures the way in which two bodies, encountering in a movement of dance through the rhythms and vibration of music, become-(each)other, are taken down a line of flight of absolute deterritorialisation that shatters social determinations, losing them-Selves and their faces – social identities, roles, responsibilities… they become a vibration among other vibrations, "*a* life" (Deleuze 2010a). Un-bound, the dancers become unassimilable to social rules, to the "the striated space" that "draws a path that must be

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[101] We might say that the camera is actualising a virtuality of the situation that we would not have otherwise easily recognised: a fluidity that the human eye does not perceive, concerned as it is with stabilising entities.

followed from one point to another" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 377). They resist being socially successful *in*dividuals. They, like Onurbio when dancing, start to desire on "smooth" surfaces[102].

As such, the dance bears signs of revolutionary deterritorialisation. Yet, (Onurbio's) practice of tango also suggests that current socio-economic systems need this fluid movement to stop and be contained. Liberation of this desire would resolve in an extremely socially disruptive "chaosmosis" (Guattari 1995) – some people dancing anywhere at any time, in the office, on the street; many people not dancing at all. The dance instead happens within a bounded space that remains stable: the 'right' environment. Becoming happens in a niche within a whole organisation of space and time, codified as either appropriate or inappropriate for setting desire free. Life is dichotomised in separate realms: labour/leisure, production/consumption, work-time/free-time. One can lose identity in the bounded space of the dancefloor, in the evening or during the weekend, but not on Monday mornings – when s/he is supposed to be at work, self-consistent and effective in meeting job's requirements.

The unbounded, irreverent, unruly becomings that are constitutive of life-as-process are channelled: necessary life reproduction on one side; 'leisure' on the other. As Figure 1 tells us, the latter is no less territorialised than the former: a socially defined free space is almost a paradox, which produces but a faded image of the (im)productivity of desire, its ghost and, indeed, "spectre". In the very moment the infinitely deterritorialising movement of dance is reterritorialised in the ballroom, it changes. From revolutionary becoming, to entertainment and fun: vicarious outlet of life energies; re-generation of the exhausted bodily energy worn out in those long hours of labour that, as we shall see, Onurbio both laments and desires.

Whole material-semiotic assemblages, 'leisure spaces', provide the right environment for body energy to move in the right ways, so lines of deterritorialisation might get mad within the room but do not squirt out. Commodification is a very central part of this. Free time is turned into profit for capital as leisure often entails consumption: electricity, bars, restaurants, technologies, dresses, transport, iPods… Desire is doubly re-territorialised as both culturally acceptable and economically productive. In neoliberal

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[102] Tango dancing can also be seen as the space where obscene desires correlative to (Onurbio's) bourgeois righteousness can be lived and enacted. Becoming a body of pure sensuality in a Buenos Aires suburb milonga at the turn of the past century; becoming-poor, migrant, outcast, destitute.

societies, instead of being liberated desire is liberalised: inserted in cycles of production and consumption that mobilise planetary resources and energies[103].

Attracted by the promise of more, always novel, enjoyment and exciting encounters, Onurbio and his wife travel almost every weekend to tango festivals, they drive for many hours, or they fly to European capitals. He spends time on Booking.com to find the right accommodation – not too expensive (especially now that he is unemployed), but always new and clean. Special moments of consumption are instituted in the couple's routine for going to the shops (or online) and buy some nice clothes that fit them… They enjoy the luxurious locales of tango events: old palaces, deconsecrated churches, villas in the countryside. They socialise, go eating and drinking at fashionable restaurants, use their body-energy as they move through the embraces of different bodies. Sometimes these encounters are so exciting, so *perfect* that *even if it is the first time that you dance together you think 'we, in our previous life, must have danced so much!'*, like in the case of that dancer with the *most beautiful back on earth*. Once the dance is finished, Onurbio goes back to the embrace of his wife. Once the event ends, there's his house with its polished white interiors – appropriately tidied up by the cleaning woman. Now, sharing memories on Facebook becomes a site for the vicarious enjoyment of that excitement of pure becoming that does not find an appropriate space within the contours of everyday life.

He and his wife need money for the assemblages they enter and set in motion: cars and roads (petrol, concrete, machines and people for their construction and maintenance), computer technologies (the Silicon Valley, social media, investors, designers, Chinese workers, ships), planes (steel, engine, petrol, technology, on-board assistants, whole airports, engineers, factory workers), hotel rooms (sheets, cleaning products, labour, electricity and gas, plaster, paint, telephone, TV), venues (heating or refrigerating, lights, technologies, tables, chairs, refreshments), clothes (manufacturers, animals-becoming-leather, plants-becoming-cotton…), music (past composers, living deejays, speakers, electronic appliances), food and drinks (soil, insects, pesticides, animals, milk, eggs, seeds, Monsanto, fertilisers), local histories and exotic cultures (past socio-economic

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[103] And it is worth noticing that the more desires become socially accepted and acceptable, the more social effort it takes to re-inscribe them within assemblages of commodified consumption. Dancing tango was once seen as obscene and therefore rejected by mainstream society: desire would not even dare to 'go' there, to produce tango-assemblages. Against the threat of the Argentinian suburb filled with prostitutes, tango today articulates sensuous desiring becomings in ways that can be comfortably inhabited by married and wealthy couples.

regimes and their power display, religious cults, savoir faire, artisans, entrepreneurs, maps, tourist guides)… This all requires Onurbio and his wife to be active part of post-industrial economies, and this in turn requires him to be a successful (i.e. rich) individual.

Hence, although the dance puts in motion a line of flight that challenges Onurbio's self-consistency, the becomings that take place cannot and do not reach the smooth surface of a becoming-imperceptible. Tango remains a space where his identity can be deterritorialised to become un-married, un-bound, un-settled, happily un-employed… poor. But this process is safe, reversible, localised, re-inserted into late capitalist economy, made functional to its perpetuation. In this light, there is very little of revolutionary left in Onurbio's becoming-poor in his movement of dance. After having left his body speak, become, lose identity, accumulate dirt and smells…

…Onurbio sanitises his shoes. Before the room is even left, what there is of inappropriate with respect to his life's order and body discipline is sprayed upon, annihilated, so that nothing is to contaminate their hygienic control. Desire is revolutionary, and it is better to keep it in check.

I voluntarily lingered on this vignette because it introduces, and is well synthesised by, the image Onurbio chose for "energy":

Figure 2

O: Fine! So… what do you want

[…]

A: why did you choose these images…?

O: aaaah! Okay. So, first image: energy. Energy… this is the image I found – which obviously I could not shoot.

A: mh

O: which, to me, represents the kind of energy that is human energy… <u>but</u>, orientated towards entertainment. So the energy that comes out of a disco dancefloor, filled with <u>young people</u> full of… <u>energy</u>, of <u>desire to live</u>, of… <u>hormones</u>, of… with: loud music, lights, and so on… what comes out of this is aaaaa… that if they could <u>channel</u> it, this energy would produce… <u>light for a month</u> – I don't know…! [we both laugh]

A: I agree

O: 'cause, I had thought about a different kind of energy, again human, which is like… that of the gym. But it felt more like a pain, that of the gym [I laugh]. That you are there and you <u>lift up kilograms of stuff</u>, you have a hard time. Whereas this energy is positive. Energy of entertainment, energy that… and also with these colours: red, orange, and so on… it was perfect.

For Onurbio[104], the human body is deeply linked to "energy": a molecular line compared with molar assemblages that construct energy mainly as electricity and

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[104] And not only for him, as we shall see.

combustion – which is at the basis of mechanised, technological (and ecologically problematic) systems of production and consumption[105]. Seeing energy as fundamentally linked to the body challenges (profit-oriented) assemblages of automation and substitution of human beings by technology. The almost sensuous passion that Onurbio expresses for *the body* as such, its movements, its stubbornly creative chemical constitution and becoming… these also point to a life-affirming desire of embodied reconnection, search for material encounters as the site of embedded, emplaced, sustainable[106] enjoyments – bodies-touching-moving.

Nonetheless, these molecular lines are quickly lead back to the striated spaces of capitalist consumerist society. The use of body energy remains confined to spaces and times of leisure or free time (the *disco* and the *gym*). The alienation of free time, *entertainment*, from labour prevents the idea (and the practice) that one might use one's own energy as part of the production and re-production of existence: enjoyment is identified with activities of (dissipative) consumption. A strange kind of passive extraction remains: if only the energy of people dancing could be *channelled*… you could produce light for days. Bodies can be the sources of green power, so to speak; but this, instead of happening through an active putting-to-use of their potency, implies them 'being used' by someone else[107]. What could have been a rejection of ecologically damaging capitalist relations of production and consumption becomes instead responsible for a spiralling escalation of resource and energy use.

But can this be the whole story?

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[105] Human energy is indeed importantly considered in radical ecology literature, despite not finding significant space in the literature on sustainable transitions, but in Roberts (forthcoming). For instance, Georgescu-Roegen (2003) and, more recently, Shiva (2009) give attention to the human body as a renewable and ecological source of energy for many tasks like commuting or agricultural practice. They argue that using the human body instead of machines implies less strain on material resources (as machines need not be built in the first place) and less energy demand in terms of electricity, petrol and the like. More generally, feminist literature (notably Salleh 2017; Haraway 2016) often poses body-energy as one of the possible vehicles for ecological reconnections and repair.

[106] In talking about "sustainable enjoyments" I am firstly referring to a sort of 'existential' sustainability: what a body as limited and embedded can do, can sustain (see Braidotti 2006a; 2006b). There might be, nonetheless, ecological consequences to this conception, which would be worth pursuing in future research and will be addressed below.

[107] …the shadow in the background of Figure 2, confronting anonymous bodies as a kind of leader: capital as over-codification of these bodies' flows of *hormones*?

Figure 3

Soon after taking the first photo (Figure 1), Onurbio took the one above (Figure 3). They are apparently similar, but much has indeed changed. If the first I called an "image-movement", where time was introduced indirectly as a result of movement being visualised; this can be seen as an "image-time": time features directly as absolute movement (Deleuze 2005b). Nothing here is still. There are no bodies moving in space relative to something else that does not: space is 'out of joint', loses fixity. Objects become streams, lights generate flows, the floor multiplies in an infinite number of planes and bodies become incorporeal shadows among others. Things really are undistinguishable now, each taken in a process of becoming-chair, becoming-man-and-woman, becoming-curtain, becoming-butterfly. It is an absolutely open movement of deterritorialisation: pure becoming and pure desire – the kind of desire that does not go back to monotonous cycles of work and consumption as the sun rises again. Figure 3 reminds us that re-inscription of desiring processes is never closed: desire keeps moving; deterritorialising movements lurk in the unconscious of normalised life formations; Life, after all, sets in as the un-determined.

As such, the practice of tango remains expression of Onurbio's life force, desire to become, to connect to his own and others' bodies, to accept new challenges. He likes tango because *I like difficult things, things that have to do with muscular linking… with a coordination […] putting together body, coordination, control. […] and to this, tango* *adds the dimension of sharing with others*. As a continuous challenge to better connect with his own body in relation with others, tango opens for Onurbio new assemblages, increases his potency, intelligence, capacity to effectively act in the world. It is a space of good encounters and joyous affects. Take this passage from my fieldnotes, where I report some thoughts Onurbio was telling me about dancing tango with his wife:

...and then tango came, which is anyway "a good alternative to television": going out, staying up until late, travelling, the new clothes... it's a "fantastic <u>*energiser*</u>*" for both. It keeps their energy levels high and prevents them from letting themselves go, like many do when they turn 50 – you see them sloppy and with their fat bellies.*

Underneath a whole mobilisation of socially normalised and normalising assemblages – the television as 'gold standard' of free time, the middle-aged individuals with their bodies decaying, the chase for novelty, the idea that travelling and getting excited about a new dress is something desirable… underneath all this, one might argue that life is still pulsing, still demanding expression. The pitch of excitement that I can hear when Onurbio talks about dancing is really saying that the body, "as the germ of life" <u>can and always does</u> "split open the paving stones": it "has been preserved and lives on…" (Deleuze 2005b: 167). Figure 3 does not signify a *truer* or *deeper* desire, Onurbio's unconscious secret. Together with the other ones, it embodies the co-existence of many different lines along which contemporary desire incessantly moves. Both a successful bourgeois and a body-pariah, Onurbio enters shifting energy assemblages that make him be the one, the other, both at a time, none of them.

Onurbio's lines seem to oscillate, indecisively, between the two poles: 'rich' faciality (identity, Self) and 'poor' desire of pure becoming. But I would argue that only the latter, im-personal life force, can bear the seeds for disruption of unsustainable assemblages centred around productivism/consumerism. Once this force speaks, in fact, desire is called to respond to a very specific question – <u>why</u> all this work, all this effort within assemblages that Onurbio laments being a toil: the office from 9 am to 5 pm, the ignorant bosses, the pressure to get the work done by deadlines…? Especially now that he is unemployed, he often speaks this question: is that kind of life really worth living? "What is the point?" (Braidotti 2006b: 15). Ultimately, that the movement of becoming-poor is stretched to more radical conclusions; that 'his' lines of subjectification are brought away from the myth of work for material affluence and towards the production of less materialistic but more hedonistic assemblages – this depends on who wins the battle: the molar organisation of the economy or a molecular politics of desire.

In this ongoing battle are engaged lines of territorialisation; encounters with distant others; economic discourses; future prospects; anxieties; desires. Let us go back for a moment to Figure 2. Later in the interview, I asked Onurbio about the role, the importance and the use of that energy in his everyday life.

O: probably it's very it's very much linked to my life. Because my energy has always been that of movement, right? I'm not that fond of disco so that kind of representation <u>doesn't</u> represent me, but energy in the sense of practicing sport, of outdoor physical activity, of... but even the very disposition of furniture in the office… I used to change it often.
A: ah!
O: because, because… I thought it as a positive, dynamic, thing. Because the fact of--- of change, right? Of a situation that evolves, that <u>stimulates</u> you. I am a curious person and as such I like change. So--- "what's next" [sic]? And so you go on. Ehmmm the wind, air, it's it's… it's probably my element […]. Unfortunately when you are in the office the air is… well, you know!
A [jokingly]: ...conditioned!
O: but I needed it for paying the the the things to do outdoors – being outside, the holidays, activities, movement.
A: and you think that, for instance, having less money for moving around and travelling and so on you would not have been able to enjoy <u>that</u> air, that movement, so much?
O: it's all proportionate. I would… I would have gone cycling instead, I would have gone running…
A: mh
O: I would have gone… yeah
A: but but… would have that been something <u>less</u>, in some ways, for you?
O: mmm… no.
A: no
O [pauses, eats some crisps]: no because even my being today is less than something else. But, if this is what I can afford, I enjoy it!

In this extract, Onurbio depicts 'his' 'natural' desire as Movement, absolute fluidity, unruly becoming, continuous deterritorialisation. In this sense, his energy brings him *outside*, into the wild, in the midst of (natural) elements. This energy flees work in the office: becoming-poor. But as soon as desire is put in motion (both in the interview and in his everyday life), it is also territorialised: it takes molar forms such as the dynamism of the successful self-entrepreneur or of the omnivorous consumer; the "breath of fresh air" involves inter-continental flights, artificial snow for skiing, parachutes. This is why work is needed within the (libidinal) economy of his everyday life – because the desiring lines that traverse it are so much territorialised around (conspicuous) consumption that they require a significant amount of purchasing power.

But also the opposite is true: one needs to believe that more money to spend means more enjoyment for justifying the toils of a life of work. A toil that is, in turn, part of a very local ideology of work, sacrifice and success. Upbringing, social expectations, friends, social media, cultural values… these all charge unsustainable assemblages with a libidinal investment that is excessive: beyond rational calculations and unmasking of contradictions, work and enjoyment are bound in a relation of necessity. Enjoyment is consumption, consumption requires money, money labour. And yet again, a line of flight is at work. Would a less expensive (and more ecological) way of using energy, of moving, be a lesser enjoyment? *No.* This *no* has the power of shattering everything, of setting in motion a proper counter-consumerist embracement of becoming-poor both for Onurbio and for the collectives that speak through his words. But we might feel anguish in this *no*. The (social) anguish of needing to start all over again: facing the absurdity[108] of a whole way of life and re-constituting new beliefs, meanings, values, practices, things. The *no* seems to be, for Onurbio, so frightening that it needs to be soon reterritorialised within a hierarchy of *more* and *less* where enjoyment is identified with material affluence… and the necessity of work-for-consumption thereby reinstated.

We have further support for this interpretation later in the interview. Onurbio repeatedly says that happiness and real privilege lie more in your attitude to the world (interior stimuli, being able to enjoy life as it is) than in material wellbeing. He makes the example of the people he sees when he goes on holiday in poor countries: his view is that *we judge them as poor devils* but actually, you realise people just make the most of what they have. He saw African children make-do to enjoy themselves with the little they have even as they walk miles to take water; people in Cuba (*can you think of someone unluckier!*) dance, play music, have fun on the streets. On the contrary, people in the West often complain about life while they have any kind of material comfort. Leaving aside

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[108] And this absurdity, evidently, is testified not by some transcendent standard but by this very reasoning.

the ideological nature of this perspective[109]; what interests us is that Onurbio is making the 'molecular' point that happiness has little to do with affluence. But as soon as this idea comes to his mind, it is reterritorialized along the lines of luck-as-affluence, because he admits that after all *yeah, they had the misfortune of being born there instead of somewhere else*. As he soon admits that *Berlusconi's son probably eeee if he were born the son of Berlusconi's servant, well probably… that would make a difference*, one can sense a libidinal investments in richness, success and excess so that the realisation of the simple, bare, beauty of life is overrun by investment in-to the <u>more</u>, the major: the position of the affluent Western White Man.

Such libidinal charge also ultimately shapes Onurbio's experience of unemployment and its prospects for establishing more ecological everyday assemblages. Losing his job has initially been *a shock*. At the level of everyday habits, after all that time in employment, he felt lost and almost afraid that he would not know what to do. Unemployment meant no longer being able to fit those categories of social success and desirability that he had always inhabited so well – becoming-pariah:

At the beginning you become a little anxious because you say to yourself 'fuck I no longer work, what do I do, how do I…' or you try to see possible… you are <u>lost</u>. And then, you start being a little more eee <u>rational</u>, you reflect

…and you find out it is not all so bad. He has made efforts to reconstruct his life through a number of informal occupations – ranging from paid tango activities, investing in stock markets, skiing, playing golf… Some of these have the objective to earn some money, other are done for the sake of them. And overall, these activities are those he most enjoys. So, he underscores how he feels <u>*so well, so well!*</u> now that he has found back the time for, and the pleasure of, those practices that were stolen from him by work:

O: […] the fact of being able to enjoy--- of being able to enjoy <u>anyway</u> this beauty – which is nature around us… from Vittorio Veneto – you know, we live in a paradise!
A: mh

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[109] It can in fact be argued that it is functional to the perpetuation of world inequalities under an agenda of "being able to enjoy life, after all": it justifies material deprivation <u>for some</u> in diminishing its import.

O: like going skiing during wintertime, roaming around the mountains in the summer… but even simply going for a walk by the seaside, but…
A: mh
O: for thirty-five years I could not do these things. And so now I do them… with very much pleasure I do them […] Fuck! When you work, work for thirty-five years from 8 am on Monday morning 'till 5 pm on Friday… these things you do not get to do. […] and so… how can you not enjoy?! Let's enjoy, for now, and then… there's always suicide then!

Here again, his body-as-life gets rebellious. How much of the simple beauties of the nature around us is he losing while sitting in an office; how much of this all could he enjoy…! And yet, investment in richness sets in and disrupts the happiness of letting go and becoming-poor: *suicide* lurks in the background.

Onurbio often mentions, half serious and half ironic, the perspective of suicide. The first time, I took it light-heartedly as a joke: his middle-class house, the fact that his wife earns a good and secure income, his frequent travels and expensive sport passions… in a word, his whole life, seemed to me so distant from any serious threat to decently comfortable survival, that it could not be but a joke. But his repeated, excessive, use of that scenario pointed to a line that was always coming back on a traumatic point: the encounter with the spectre of Poorness. It is as if all the territorialised assemblages – the things and norms, cars, bank accounts, roads, gentrified historic centres, luxury jewellery, fashionable clothes, social recognition and social mobility, travels to exotic places – he lived by, without the support of a secure income, suddenly crumbled down. The anxiety of a desire losing constituted forms, a lost desire… Will it reterritorialize on the ashes and spectres of exhausted post-industrial neoliberal assemblages? Or else find in this suspension – closed down factories, uncertainty, unemployment… the opportunity for new, more ecologically sound, assemblages? Will the event of becoming-poor be counter-effectuated, embraced as an opportunity for more life?

Let us go back for a moment to the beginning of this story: going to a tango evening was itself a passing-through an emerging socio-cultural paradigm of ecological reconnection and renewal, embodied in tables, rooms, glasses recycled from old bottles, a former industrial site now made an open space of assembly[110]. Although Onurbio had

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[110] Not that these are straightforward signs of a transition towards sustainability (and indeed they might be seen as an ultimately ineffective mainstreaming of it); yet, they bear the signs of its currency.

openly aligned himself against this ‘green’ trend, the molar assemblages of his everyday life are continuously traversed by its molecular unsettlement of capitalist voraciousness. He himself reiterates that he is committed to make some efforts towards a more sustainable livelihood. He talks about giving up those things *that you give up easily and… for the benefit of others – like old clothes, instead of throwing them away you bring them over there, aaand water – you close it, switch-off lights… these things are so…* easy to do.

Yet, whenever I prompt him to think about changes that would entail giving up something *more* in the interest of sustainability, like having *less clothes* (instead of too many to throw away) he becomes strangely silent:

O: I don’t know, I’ve never posed myself this problem. Like, when they have asked politicians to reduce their salary. For a moment I imagined to be a politician with these people telling me redu--- take--- cut your salary
A: mmmh! Mh
O: what could I…? I don’t know! [pause] I don’t… I don’t have any idea.
A: mh
[silence]
O: I mean… I cannot even imagine <u>what</u> it might be… Clearly, if tomorrow the bomb explodes--- the war explodes… I don’t know, I don’t know.

A different and less consumerist society is literally un-articulable. As desire brings Onurbio along a becoming-poor that might open the opportunity for a livelier post-materialist existence, he is also constantly folded back upon striations of an affluent society that largely close the horizon of imagination. Thinking about society differently is… like a *bomb*, a shock. Becoming-poor thus seems to remain a loose end whose creativity is thwarted: lines of flight do not seem to be able to find novel productive assemblages…

6.1.2. Becoming-hippie; or: how to botch the BwO

E: well when I was with Ugo[111]*... well, you know, Ugo: money was not an issue. The future was a house with the pool, with the park, the house for the… the… the family that would have taken care of us*[112]*. Yeah, a dream house. And I did not have any problem: I was economically secure*[113] *[she laughs]*
A: eh
E: now instead I am not. Because, anyway, I live in a rented flat; aaand yes I have a job but it pays 900 euros per month – which allows to pay for the rent. Mmmm.
A: and how did you experience this thing, how did you…?
E: but, yeah, you know, I have been the one to decide to split up so I prefer freedom to econ--- to to economic security, that's it. I mean, I have thought it through, which is the reason why I temporised.
A: mh
E: 'cause let's be honest: we are not… eehm having a good life, and you lack nothing, especially when you hear other people telling you "Erika but you dunno what it means to be in the position to live without the need to penny pinch, you dunno!" – and you say: "yes it's true that I don't know… and what if I'll need to do that?"[114] *[...] And, you know, the idea of going to live in a villa with the pool, the park, aaaand we also had – to give you an idea – an elevator and the gym and so on and so forth, you just name it –*

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[111] In this section, I use the real name of my participant, Erika, as she agreed. Yet, I invent pseudonyms for the husband, his family and the children. I pick these up from my own family names, because there are interesting affinities in life trajectories and as a way of reminding (myself) how much of 'me' there is – across the territory, my research, analysis, conclusions.

[112] In Italian there is an evident shift between the first two articles ("the"), which are plural, and the one that precedes the term "family", which is singular (*i... i... la famiglia*, in the original). It is possible to envisage here the struggle between two assemblages of enunciation – one that calls service people as such and one that attributes them a more palatable expression: *the family that takes care of us*. This seems to me in line with increasing discursive denial, but libidinal-economic perpetuation, of social differences.

[113] The Italian word Erika uses, "serenità", has an affective-emotional charge to it, indicating a sort of 'peacefulness', so to speak. But I am afraid there is no commonly used expression in English that can convey this.

[114] In reporting this ideal dialogue, Erika shifts to dialect – as if to communicate colloquial, down-to-earth common wisdom. What *other people* say is often a feature of her talk – and the desire to be rich, beyond the problems of ordinary people, is already social, collective, and not only 'hers'.

made of glass[115] *because we would build a whole room made of glass, in Conegliano*[116] *city--- close to Conegliano public swimming pool*

A: mh mh

E: aaaand and then, yes, coming here that anyway is a nice apartment… Well, anyway I knew it. I mean, I have thought it through but anyway…

A: you prefer this

E: I prefer freedom. Now I start sleeping at night! Before, I couldn't sleep.

A: mh mh

E: I mean… I think I am <u>richer</u> now than then, that's it

A: so overall it was worth it?

E: yes.

It all started with the 2008 financial crisis. Erika was still married with one of the wealthiest men in the area. Ugo and his family own a company (which I will call Faganello) of international profile; the main business is now in another city, although it was set up by the father in Vittorio Veneto, from scratch. Before 2008 Erika, the husband, their three young children and the nanny used to live in the mansard of a block they owned in Vittorio Veneto. But the attic was becoming a little small for all of them. They sold their apartment with the project of building a new house. This, which she repeatedly calls a *dream house*, forcefully holds and attracts Erika, especially for the images of future it embodied and condensed. These libidinal pulls sometimes spur in moments of surging affect that crack through her body and move it, to express both melancholy for what she could have and the good reasons for renouncing to it…

As we are descending [by car] the road from the hills and taking that towards Conegliano city centre, Erika gives a start: here is where our house should have been built! This is

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[115] This is a very clear example of how desire assembles and works with signs as much as objects and materials. *Glass*: the libidinal charge in glass does not 'mean' anything, but it is itself part of assemblages of capital-money-power – skyscrapers where the big powers of industry decide the next market to target; contemporary financial districts; modernist buildings with their Light of transparency …

[116] Conegliano is a town 15 km away from Vittorio Veneto – the two are rather close in terms of culture, historical trajectory, productive-commercial flows, size. Vittorio Veneto has had (and still to some extent maintains) a more molecular, revolutionary spirit, some Marxist groups, a 'popular' and proudly working-class fringe. Especially in recent decades, Conegliano has experienced more economic success both in terms of production and trade, which makes it more 'aligned' to molar capitalist assemblages. It might not be by chance that Erika moved from Vittorio Veneto to Conegliano.

the plot of land we bought. They would have needed to demolish everything (there is an old 1960s house, rather big) and build afresh. I am a little baffled: I find this a rather unfortunate place for building a house, and all the more so a very expensive one; it's right on the road and the landscape is made up of apartment blocks on the other side of the Monticano [a torrent]. It's also a rather dark place, sunken, oriented towards the West and without any opening... But precisely as I am thinking this, Erika starts to praise the position of that house – "'cause in five minutes walking you're in Conegliano city centre!". Okay, understood. We take the road that goes precisely in that direction, which, as always at this time of the day, is very busy. As we slow down, she tells me the story of that house...

Everything was ready to start building – they even had a model. Then the crisis came and Ugo's business experienced a moment of uncertainty, so the project was put on hold. The financial problems for the family did not last long and things started to work again for the business. Not for their relationship, though, as she took conscience of *Ugo's and his family's lack of interest: who knows when the house would actually be ready!* Furthermore, she was no longer sure about their relationship and she did not feel like committing to such a demanding endeavour… so in the end they gave up the project and moved in another apartment and then to this one[117]. They lived here for two years and then they split up.

The would-be house is the materialisation (in sketches and models, at least) of all those assemblages of desire that moved (and to a large extent still move) Erika's everyday practices, pleasures, gestures. The closeness to the city centre, the convenience of being close to all that matters: glittery shops, fashion clothes, high-ranking schools, smart bars and restaurants that get flooded by like-minded-bodied people at evening, after work. The visibility of the house: being under everyone's eyes, inviting friends along. Its spaciousness as power, freedom, self-affirmation. But also the fact that it provided the space and material conditions that, to Erika, are the most favourable for making her sons' life special and happy (and her, a good mother): a pool, the park, the possibility of having a dog. From how her marriage ended up, we can start guessing in retrospect that the *dream house* was an agent of attraction to, and territorialisation on, a life that was less than

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[117] Where she currently lives. It is a modern apartment in San Vendemiano, a municipality very close to Conegliano – so much so that the two are often considered one big conurbation. Although she did not purposefully look for this, her apartment is just a few metres from where her parents live and she was raised as a child, which might be seen as a reterritorialisation – going back to (a poor, as we shall see) infancy.

fulfilling: as the lines of desire grew stronger with the house project's development, so did a sort of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) keep Erika tied to Ugo. Her biographical and social trajectory seems to support this intuition.

Erika is roughly 40 years old. She grew up in a moment of strong productivity and economic expansion in the North East. It was a moment in which anybody could feel that, with some luck and much hard work, s/he could become rich. Of working-class background, she started working at Faganello company as secretary. Soon after, Ugo, the owner's son, fell in love with her and they got married. The *dream* husband. Through him, she had access to all those (energy-intensive) assemblages that were continuously under her eyes and yet unattainable: living in the city centre, big and showy cars, beauticians and hair dressers to sustain an admirable bodily appearance, always new clothes, fashion bags, shoes, money for private schools, the nanny for the children – respectability. Through the marriage, and thus subject to a man's socio-economic power, Erika's life trajectory was thus inserted in a (unequally gendered) machine of upward mobility, economic growth and capital accumulation that is both typical of (late-)capitalism in its widest sense <u>and</u> local in character (the North East being an 'incubator' of these processes at that time). Precisely because it was successful, this trajectory strongly attached 'her' to the assemblages of upper-middle class everyday life that marked her social ascent.

In this process, the husband (his name, his appearance, his work, his life…) was and remained strongly charged as intensive point because he was the provider of all this, it was <u>on him</u> that this all depended. This allowed acceptance of the husband's distance – long working weeks away from home, lack of attention, sexual disinterest, a lover. Better, wealth became a <u>compensation</u> for all this:

"I've never been a spendthrift, or clinging to money". True, Ugo always reproached her for being so, but the fact is that "if you live with a factory worker" you set your standards accordingly but if you "marry a Faganello…" you know you have certain economic possibilities – so the money, you spend it… <u>other things lacking…!</u> We laugh.

Many things were lacking, but many fetishes of wealth were holding the couple together instead. Erika's body was almost embroiled in a tangle of objects, habits, conversations… that stuck her desire to where it was – to <u>Ugo</u>. His success strongly sustained and channelled dreams and desires.

But if all this is easily pinned down to existing and territorialised assemblages, her decision to (partly) leave all this behind is not. It can rather be thought of as an *event*, a moment of subjectification that "counter-effectuates" a becoming-poor, destitute, imperceptible that flees from a 'rich' but sorrowful life. The crisis was functional to this because the uncertainty that it implied suspended, if for a fleeting moment, the power of these libidinal investments. Erika thus passed a threshold where wealth-desires started to lose their grip. This opened a space for the sudden realisation that *freedom is more important*[118]*, Alice.* From the molar-major desire of (male) wealth and success, towards the molecular-minor search for freedom in a becoming-woman. Material de-appropriation means freedom because it emancipates desire from the imperative to chase (dead) money and commodities: becoming-poor, which opens a space for *the search* of affective proximities, the constitution, of (lively) affective assemblages.

In this process, lines of a humbler past are re-actualised: they give Erika the instruments and opportunities for imagining different kinds of happiness, different value hierarchies. For instance, being a woman from a working-class family means being sensitive to the practical and functional rather than ostentatious value of things. These are qualities that help downscaling energy transitions:

E: and then eeehm he had--- I mean, it's him who gives me the car. He had given me the Infinity but then *I* *asked for a Cinquecento! [...] 'cause with the Infinity I would spend 100 euros per week on fuel*
A: ah!
E: and I, throwing away five hundred euros on fuel, each month
A: indeed…!
E: to just show up, Alice, I don't care about that at all – at all!
A: no, yeah!
E: of course, like--- with the Infinity you certainly make an impression! But I am perfectly happy with the other one![119]
A: ahah
E: I spend between 20 and 30 euros a week… 40 when I need to drive the children around – each week…!

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[118] Something goes amiss in this translation, because Erika is using a phrase that indicates *value* (*la libertà ha più valore*) and that has therefore both monetary and affective connotations (in line with the hypothesis that economy is also always a libidinal economy).

[119] For the latter three lines, Erika switches to dialect.

A: so that's enough!
E: it works just fine for me!

Erika is here voicing (quite literally, by talking in dialect) the practical wisdom of a minor population (poor, woman) who 'knows' that what is important about cars is that they work, i.e. their use value. An object's use value has a limit, which is its capacity to fulfil the job it has been built for, to work *just fine* for what you need to do. Decreased affluence brings Erika back to this minor sensitivity that cherishes what is enough (the Cinquecento) rather than looking for the infinite escalation of conspicuousness and energy consumption (ironically called precisely Infinity!): *I have never disowned my origins*, as she says. This supports Alier's (2002) proposition that environmentalism is first of all "of the poor" and the eco-feminist claim that women, out of their having historically been providers of care in the sphere of reproduction, are better positioned to appreciate things for their concrete and embodied contributions to life rather than for their abstract exchange-value as commodities (Salleh 2017; see also Leonardi 2018).

True, Erika is also tickled by 'male', rich, fetishes that *make an impression*. Yet, her energy transition seems co-emergent within a general search for a less materially mediated, more spontaneous, sensuous-affective engagement with reality – which Erika identifies as a (more) fundamental part of who she is

In my way of being and behaving with people I am very spontaneous [...] I have many friends, you know, Alice? Many many many friends. Even when I just meet them on the street, even if I haven't seen them for a long time, always a hug and all the rest – always, in any case. [...] I become attached, it's natural for me to love them – do you understand?

This tension comes up again when Erika describes her encounter with her new colleagues. But to understand this, it is necessary to pause for a minute to look at her workplace and her role there.

Erika started working at EcorNaturaSì in January 2015. Among the depressing landscape of at best struggling and at worse bankrupting companies in the North East, you would not expect it easy to find a job for a 40-year-old mother who had not been working for at least 15 years. She found, instead, a permanent job there, and even at her own conditions: part-time and on chosen days. But indeed, this is an exceptional company. EcorNaturaSì produces and distributes organic products[120]. That Erika found a job there, by itself, is a sign of the increasing appeal that organic and eco-conscious products are having to Italian consumers. It also points to a continuing entrepreneurial spirit in the North East, a certain ‘intuition’ and sense for profit occasions. Born as a little cooperative shop, the company has now lost much of this small-scale spirit, attracted big investors and is well implanted into a machine of capitalist growth. Still, the ideals of social and environmental responsibility, sustainability, frugality, simple and natural life that at first were the energiser of this business remain within the company’s practice, discourse and self-understanding.

This trajectory embodies a tension between a line of flight that goes towards an ecologically-sound becoming-poor and the power of the capitalist (libidinal) economy to reterritorialise it: mainstreaming sustainability. But it also emphasises how the tension is both individual and collective, it pertains as much to a territory as it pertains to Erika (and Onurbio, and, we shall see, Alberta). For entering EcorNaturaSì as an employee did imply a deterritorialisation of some sort, for Erika. When I ask her whether anything has changed for her since she started working there, she emphatically confirms: *yeees, yes.*

E: the wor--- the company, in itself, made me change. Because they, anyway, are people that live simply, with very little.
A: mh
E: and they are concerned about… ehm… not appearances: but substance. Ehm they’re the kind of people who come to work in their slippers!
A: ah so they’re quite laid back…

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[120] The company started in 1987 as a small pioneering organic shop in Conegliano, a cooperative that would sell local produce and some organic and biodynamic products from Germany. I remember going to Ariele, the affiliated little shop in Vittorio Veneto, since I was young: its notoriously high prices and ugly vegetables, the ‘alternative’ (as Onurbio would say) people working there, the upper-class customers… When I knew that Erika was working at Ecor, I was rather baffled at first, as she indeed looked quite different from their typical employee. But things have changed a lot since I was a child. With time, Ariele has expanded and joined with other cooperatives and/or companies around Italy, all of them specialised in either the production or the distribution of organic and biodynamic products; its market reached beyond niche customers. EcorNaturaSì was thus founded and now almost retains a national monopoly over the retail, distribution and (partly) production of organic and biodynamic products. Little shops have become (self-defined) supermarkets, and hundreds of them have been appearing all over Italy. The little shop in Conegliano has been replaced by a big supermarket within a retail centre just outside of the town and going to Ariele is no longer ‘alternative’. Although the company has remained based in Conegliano, a second warehouse has been opened in Bologna (centre Italy) to better deal with the expanding demands of the market.

E: very free [sic], very laid back.

Erika's encounter with these 'hippie'[121] colleagues can be seen as a fleeting and momentary becoming-poor which points to a desire to divest herself from the (emotional, material and relational) labour of being-rich: fascination with her colleagues' simplicity, a call to let go. Looking for *substance* does not need much wealth and yet can make you *rich* of affective interconnections, love, spontaneity. Erika's desire reaches towards the "Body without Organs" (BwO) (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 161), the un-organised smooth surface of freedom from organ-isation: not to care about hair, about money, about shoes… about the rich husband. It is a possibility of sustainable energy transitions: post-material prosperity.

And yet, as Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 161) put it, "[t]here are … several ways of botching the BwO: either one fails to produce it, or one produces it more or less, but nothing is produced on it, intensities do not pass or are blocked". Capital's axiomatic creates so many cuts and barriers, puts so many objects and common-sense knowledge in between, that the intensity of her demand of freedom tends to be blocked and reterritorialized:

…I anyway will never go to work like that. But I admire them, very much.
A: so you like it but that is not something… it is not a way that…
E: I do not agree with that completely, let's say
A: mh
E: I like to feel good with myself and so… ehm good with myself: I like to like myself.
A: yeah
E: and I don't like when I am scruffy [laughs] […] they are often scruffy, they're a bit… yeah, they go around like they wake up in the morning. The hair, they cut it by themselves – many of them, not all. Yeah, they're a bit… like that!

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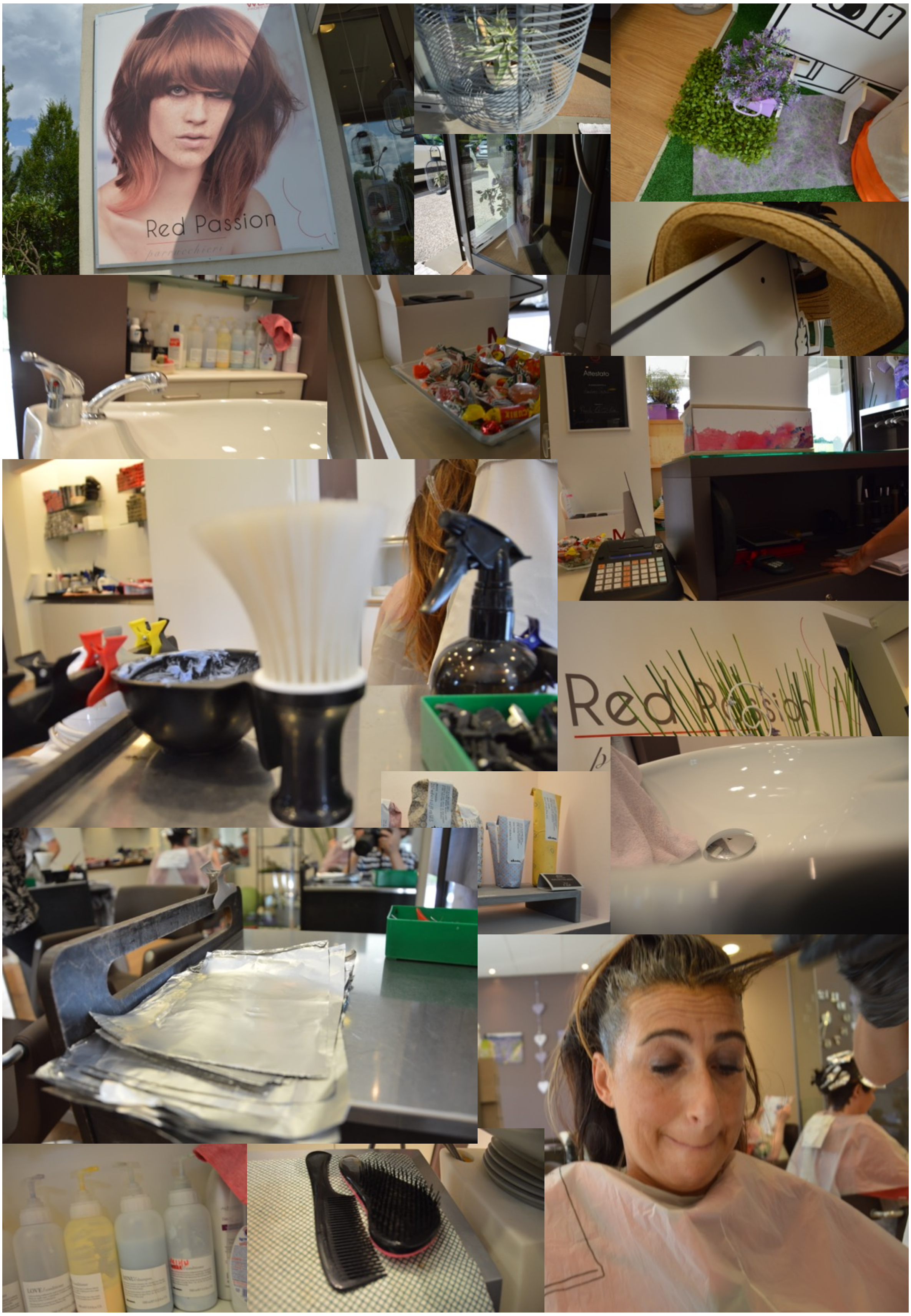
[121] She never used this term. I use it because often deployed in certain contexts to indicate people who live differently than socially sanctioned parameters of 'respectability' – order, hard work, Catholicism, respect for shared norms of clothing-housing-leisure. I find the image particularly inspiring because it refers to a social movement that, despite its rather problematic/contested outcomes, did posit itself as a line of flight: hippies rejected alienated labour and bourgeois identities while moving towards the freedom of dispossession and less materialistic relationships to the world (becoming-poor) (see Leonardi 2018). Further, another name attributed in Italian to the hippies is "capelloni" – people with long hair – and we shall soon find Erika talking about hair…



I am a bit of a hairdresser addicted. I can give up many things… but the hairdresser – never!

During our day together, Erika, her youngest (5-year-old) son and I spent one and a half hours at the hairdresser salon[122]. She goes there twice a week for having her hair washed and set – she never washes her hair at home because she complains she is not able to make it look nice if she dries it by herself. This time the dye was due, so it took even longer. While I was sitting with her son on the salon's couch, he asked me the camera because he wanted to take some photographs. It was a way of keeping him busy and not getting bored so I lent it to him quite happily – and for good. The camera in fact worked almost as a magnet, an accelerator of libidinal attractions, flows, productions[123]. He set into an almost "schizophrenic walk" through the objects, fluids, counters, synthetic flowers, candies, etc. A becoming-tool, becoming-woman, becoming-shampoo. The libidinal intensity of this place, cultivated through repeated visits, was circulating through the body of the young child – fascinated by the skills and materials employed, by the mother, by the ad with its red-passioned girl on show; and at the same time already in flight (the flowers, the plant… *I want to take a photo of those flowers!*).

This proliferation points to the charge of this space-practice within the everyday libidinal economy of the family. It starts introducing the idea that Erika's rejection of hippie-ness and reterritorialization on anti-ecological 'richness' happens through a clinging to the Self as 'respectable' appearance. To the spontaneity or pragmatism of poor-ness (small cars, slippers at work, scruffy hair, a hug), a whole system of energy intensive assemblages is opposed, which functions to affirm, sustain and re-produce her Self: care for her body articulated through habitual visits to beauticians and hairdressers, clothes and shoes shops, make up, etc.; the car, which, although rescaled, needs to be *normal, decent*; the apartment, which is *nice* big, new, air conditioned; the private school for her children; the weekly evenings out with friends; et cetera. Self-as-subject (decent,

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[122] The salon where we went is committed to reducing its environmental impact by using bio-degradable, natural, organic and artisanal Italian products; reducing packaging; giving attention to the traceability of ingredients – part of which are certified by Slow Food ("a not-for-profit association, committed to […] promote good, clean and fair food for everyone": http://www.slowfood.it/chi-siamo/che-cose-slow-food/). Erika seems almost unaware of, or indifferent to, this. She comes here because she likes the hairdresser's style, that she is always up-to-date with new cutting and dying techniques. As with Onurbio, our day is traversed by 'green' consumption spaces despite both not looking for them explicitly; which again testifies that sustainability is starting to significantly configure and infiltrate our territory and everyday practices.

[123] Notably, the first thing he did was leaving the salon, going to the car park and starting to take photographs of the logos – the logos alone – of the cars that were parked there. Maybe unsurprisingly, he was well accustomed to all the expensive brands – Mercedes, Audi and Fiat; while he did not even know Citroen, Opel and Piaggio. Then, he went back in and took the photographs of the salon, with which I constructed the collage above.

accepted, consonant, even admired) : self-as-organism (fit, functioning, controlled). And this is not simply a matter of appearing *to others* as it becomes part of a perceived interiority and identity (see Rose 1990): *I like it, it makes me feel better with myself*. Even alone, *you'll never see me with a hairpin on my head! Maybe when I am at home and I need to take a shower, or if I am dead tired, or I need to do the ironing [...] but generally speaking, I am never sloppy at home*. Less and less territorialised objects and practices of decency can be let go without at the same time losing the Self.

The ritual gesture of stopping at the mirror for putting make up on before leaving the house.

What interests us is that this "faciality machine" is both destructive for ecologies, which are put under strain by the energy and materially intensive lifestyle that it puts in motion, and, only apparently paradoxically, for Erika's body itself. In a very banal way, I could sense the 'effort' of looking good in her repeated apologies for bringing me to the hairdresser for such a long time – which implied she believed the thing to be a rather boring and uneventful occupation[124]. Further, and most importantly, being able to afford this Self costs money, which Ugo provides through a monthly pay. On the one hand, Erika is thus dependent on him in a way she would not were her consumption practices less demanding. On the other, it is as if his (generous) pay were still never enough, so that Erika also feels the need to work, even if for 4,5 hours a day, to integrate it. *It's true that the 900 euros a month that I earn go directly into paying the rent for the house, but I would need to get them from somewhere in any case!*

Very interestingly, there was a moment in which Erika was moved by a different desire – one that rejected to be trapped in a working routine and instead be let free. When faced with the option of taking up the job at Ecor, in fact, she was reticent: she did not feel like going to work; she had told to herself *now I am going to do whatever I want*. She was ready to give up those extra *900 euros* (and the extra consumption) in exchange for the liberty of responding to desires as they contextually emerged: going out for a walk, to the gym, meet friends. But *people*, among whom EcorNaturaSì's manager, convinced her that she should not *even take time to reflect about* taking up that great opportunity. And indeed, she now thinks *it has been my salvation*. In fact, in a society where work and productivity are a measure of success and autonomy, a job allows Erika, a woman, to

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[124] The same did Alberta, whom we shall meet in the next section, as we spent some two hours in her bathroom while she took care of her nails and hair.

emancipate from complete dependence on a man. She also feels it good that, through her job, she can take “a breath of fresh air” from her familiar commitments, *not thinking about children all the time*, *keeping my brain active*.

There is nonetheless a funny downside to this ‘independence’ – i.e. that it simultaneously implies an even deeper subjection to molar social constructions of what is the ‘right’ way of living, of distracting from children, of remaining alive[125]. Firstly, because the decision to take up the job has always been dependent on social expectations: one of the things she likes about her job is that she can say to other people *I am doing something*; whereas *saying ‘I am a mother, and at home – and divorced…’ is also not very… respectable, I think*. Secondly, and significantly, such *respectability* is about being an active member of the capitalist economy (labourer, consumer). The molecular desires that lurked in the background were almost revolutionary in their unproductiveness, ‘inoperativeness’. But as soon as the others’ speeches and discourses start to work through Erika’s desire, the momentary deterritorialisation of ‘poor’ freedom is reterritorialised on respectable (‘rich’) work. Finally, her job drains her energy: when she gets home she is so *dead tired*.

This (more general) search for *being right*, *being fit*, *appearing acceptable* makes her life strenuous, complicated, full of problems despite there being no threat to her livelihood and even life standard[126]. A subterranean anxiety takes energy away from her and, interestingly, sets in motion further energy consumption. This becomes evident as I ask her about how her relationship to energy has changed throughout her life-course:

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[125] Walks and other kind of social intercourses could give her similar openings to the world, without leaving her *knockout*, at the end of the day. If anything, work seems to deprive her of the affective intensities of close relationships, for instance with children, which she cannot find in the office. As I got to understand, in fact, her relationships there are less than pleasurable, for she feels *observed* and almost ostracized: other women make her *feel different* because she has many clothes and often changes attire.

[126] This is very evident in her relationship to her three sons – which unfortunately there is no space here to expand upon. Erika is overly concerned about their school success, the company they keep, summer occupations. As I experienced with some embarrassment during our day together, the moments of affection and sharing that strongly draw her close to them are often ruptured by moments of rage and loud reproaches about not having studied enough, not having obtained enough, etc. that tinge the house of a certain sorrow – only counteracted by the ironical and lovely teasing that the children themselves address to her. Their personalities and practices struck me as very un-worrying though (all the more so given their privileged economic position). I was thereby pointed to the deadliness of a continuous preoccupation to see them ‘fit’ members of a deadly society.

E: eeeeh! It's changed because when I was young energy I did not think whether there was or not, 'cause in any case there was always someone looking after *me*. *Now energy… I need it for many things, I need it at home, I need it to go to work… […] I used to have a lot of energy, now I need to look for it through… ehm eeee I'll tell you, I'm always very tired, especially in this period of the year.*
A: mh
E: and I take some… to find energy – where do you find it?: in magnesium and in potassium for us women – I need to take some tablets
A: mh mh
E: homeopathic anyway, but… yeah, energy has changed. Before, I had it within myself and now I need to look for it. […]
A: while before
E: well I would always play outside…
A: did you have the feeling that it was *there?*
E: eehm I would take it for granted. Now, instead, I take nothing for granted…! Unfortunately… eheh also energy costs, and you need to look for it: anyway, if you want it you need to pay for it… yeah. […] Everything looked easy in the past […] I did not have these problems, that I have now. I mean – I'm talking about physical energy – eeee everything was fine… what is – the best… I did not have any trouble or care so anyway the energy… you've got it, to deal with life in a moment when you don't have any preoccupation… energy comes because… everything is beautiful, what is wrong there?! And now instead preoccupations and troubles are so big that you think you cannot make it and the energy you must look for it, you must have it. So if--- you also need to draw it from somewhere.
A: mh mh
E: from other people, or from tablets, or finding moments of relaxation…

Erika's *problems* have not to do with feeding the children and herself (this is far from being the case), but with the Self: the hairdresser, the domestic appliances, the nice dress, the children's success, the holiday away, people's judgements about jobless divorced mothers… It is a machine of faciality that puts her body under strain.

Her preoccupation to hold up Face, furthermore, has an excessiveness to it that we might see as the sign of a forceful reterritorialization from those momentary movements of deterritorialisation where desire moves towards the smooth surface of de-appropriation and selflessness: the risk of becoming-deviant, becoming-tramp. When

Erika gave up the dream house and all the rest, desire was fleeing the strenuousness of energy intensive life assemblages. Nothing to care about but playing *outside*. The 'hippie' colleagues at work can be seen as one of the (desiring) limits of this movement, the place where the libidinal ties that make her body stick to assemblages that imprison her body into suffocating, unfree, forms of subjectification are cut. The desire of freedom, just being, lively spontaneity… Love – which Erika often expresses and is also the motto of the hippies. Yet, this tension towards spoliation is maybe too anxiety-ridden and provokes a backlash: a search for (Self) control that does not let things be or take anything for granted. Energy-intensive molarity of rich adult against thrifty molecularity of becoming-girl, becoming-poor. And notice how the market itself gives Erika a 'solution' to her problems: the *tablets*, the *moments of relaxation* in front of the television (like the nap she took during our day together after work and lunch). Her desire being reterritorialized by magenisum and potassium as they make her body fit once again.

But it must be emphasised that this 'failure' should by no means be seen as a personal one; it is not a 'fault' or inability to entrap Erika. She is put in the condition of needing to work in order to be respected by a social organisation in which materially one is not independent unless by means of labouring. In many ways, the fact of inhabiting a precarious socio-economic space of dependency (on the rich male) can be seen as structurally implying an un-freedom of choice that translates in anxiety and an effortful chase for independence and affirmation of the Self through insertion in the capitalist economy. Hence, Erika's case suggests that bodily critique, this line of flight from the toils of production-consumption cycles, needs a collective solution, a socially-shared and radically other territory.

6.1.3. Becoming-peasant

Yeah so my mother had already started to go shopping at Ariele, things like that. To be honest, at the beginning I was, I mean, I had a bit of an antipathy. 'Cause… not in terms of fruits and vegs, but processed food… I mean whole wheat pasta I mean seven years ago, six years ago – I was not there yet… or the snacks, free-from this and this and that [I chuckle]… they tasted… I mean, a snack from Ariele compared to a Kinder Brioche…?! No way! And then, with the Masters, everything changed… yeah, totally…

Having finished her undergraduate studies in Modern Languages in 2014, Alberta was at a bit of a loss. She was not sure about what to do in her future. By chance, she found out about a master's degree at her University in Venice: Wine and Food Culture. She looked at the program and showed it also to her father, who enthusiastically encouraged her to enrol – saying that he would have done it if he had time. Alberta was intrigued by the modules and topics and in the end decided to apply – *but without sky-high enthusiasm.*

But then I said to myself "thank God I have applied", 'cause actually… I did not know what to do in my life and while I was at the master's everything got clear[127]

…she understood she wanted to work in the agricultural/agribusiness sector.

Both the different kinds of knowledge acquired (from certification systems to cycles of meat and dairy production, through to tourism initiatives and the relationship between food and religion…) and the encounters that the course afforded made her passionate about the topics and so dramatically changed her life. She recounts how the students as a group were almost taken over by the professors and lecturers, their passion, expertise and knowledge:

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[127] In this sort of 'illumination' there is a sense in which familiar lines find an articulation/actualisation within a novel life pathway. Alberta's is a middle-class family; her father is a work consultant and her mother a housewife, very devoted to hospitality and care. As such, she developed very good cooking skills and aesthetic attention to the house and garden. The father is a wine connoisseur, also passionate about natural wines – as we got the chance to discuss during our lunch together. They all like to go to gourmet restaurants and family travels are often organised with attention to wine and food as well as natural and historical attractions.

> *As soon as we had a good professor teaching us, everybody wanted to specialise in his or her subject. Like… we went… they [two professors of wine&food tourism from Pollenzo University[128]] came and everyone was like: "oh I want to specialise in the wine&food tourism sector"*

Her own interests widened and changed as a result of these encounters. For instance, *when they asked "who is more geared towards food and who towards wine", I'd always say "food"*. Because she *felt more connected with it*. But now she is also very interested in wine since she has *started to know it a bit better*, again thanks to a *professor* who was *very very good, from Conegliano*. With him, they visited vineyards and wineries *and he explained all what was going on there: the history of grapevine, how you set up a vineyard*, etc.:

> *Really super-nice. And there, you see, you think: "wow!". I mean one who's so passionate makes you passionate as well! Really very very good. Ehmmm I got lost – where did I want to get at with all this?*

The teachers mobilised libidinal currents and intensities that enriched the students' knowledge and moved their desire towards new experimentation and unforeseen ways of relating to the world. As such, they were "good encounters", marked by creativity, intelligence and joyous affects. These become tangible in the interview as embodied raptures that also take over Alberta's discourse itself, making it drift (*I got lost*), as they are re-actualised. Apart from the professors, Alberta also made another important encounter: a girl who was *almost vegan*, who became a good friend. This fact put in motion a process of opening and discovery of a whole world, that of vegetarianism, that she *did not actually know almost anything about*. She read books on the theme, got informed and *formed a very clear idea--- well, very clear is a bit of an overstatement 'cause there are definitely contradictions in that – as in all things. Anyway, I decided that… I mean I was convinced by what I had read and… it influenced me a lot. And from then… I just gave up eating meat, all of a sudden* (and fish)[129].

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[128] The University was founded by Slow Food in 2004 (see note 122 in the previous section).

[129] The history, rationale and dynamics of this choice are well articulated and thought through by Alberta, and would deserve a separate consideration that space constraints do not allow. I think it might be worth pointing out at this stage that her stance, although marked by a profound *belief* and conviction in what she is doing, is very aware of the

The experiences she was involved in with the university (e.g. visits to intensive breeding farms) strengthened her convictions by putting her into sensuous, physical, contact with the realities of animal farming:

chained-up animals squashed in small smelly stables in dubious hygienic conditions
a dead veal
pigs who cried and run away terrified as soon as they saw their owner

Differently from the encounters within the university, these experiences were marked by extremely sorrowful affects. Refraining from eating animals is, then, for Alberta also a way of warding off that sorrow from her life. Affecting and being affected by the sufferance of these animals cut the desiring lines that might still bring her towards meat. At the same time, they are moved towards different food assemblages, mainly plant based. This is why becoming vegetarian was a joyous transition, one that she feels has positively changed and opened her sensitivity to the world, albeit in a way she finds difficult to articulate. She admits not to be able to completely cut on dairies, although she would like to. But the impasse finds a solution in organic and biodynamic products, which Alberta constructs as more ethical in the treatment of animals[130].

Combined to the growing awareness about food production that Alberta was building through the master's degree, changing diet co-emerged with further changes in the ways she relates to food generally: she turned organic and her tastes moved towards natural and less processed foods. This cor-respondence is in line with socially circulating 'veg' assemblages. Knowledge and information about the environmental impact of

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complexity and ambiguity of this dietary choice. Alberta was very keen to discussing it with me (whom at the time was not a vegetarian) and open to considering different points of view. Hence, our debates had a serene atmosphere, 'joyful' and constructive, that put the both of us at ease. This was not the case for my encounter with three vegan participants, with whom discussions were experienced (at least by me) as difficult and sometimes about mutual closure. Being the age differences not extremely significant, I believe that among other things it was a certain "habitus" of thinking and living that was responsible for this. For instance, Alberta and I – apart from being of the same age – have known each other for many years, come from comparable social backgrounds (with all this implies), have attended the same high school (Liceo Classico, humanities based and still believed to be at the top of the hierarchy of school formats in Italy). This was not the case for the other group.

[130] Notably, this is also afforded by the knowledge about regulations, facts and figures of dairy production gained at university. For instance, biodynamic farms are only allowed a certain amount of milk production per animal per day, which means that their physiological rhythms are at least partially respected, as well as their relationship to the calves.

animal farming, in fact, more and more link animals' to ecosystems' welfare (Kemmerer 2014; Twine 2017). In this context, the desiring lines in which Alberta is involved tend to leave industrial snacks and bright-looking synthetic detergents for vegetarian food, whole wheat and eco-shampoos in the interests of environmental (and personal) health. The dynamic of this transition is thus embedded into wider changes (sustainability and organic discourses/commodities becoming more and more available, distinctive, normal). But the specific dynamics of this 'greening' depend on her being situated within specific assemblages, their peculiarly singular and affectively intense currents of desire. The family, for instance (the food-educated parents, the organic food already circulating in the house, the visits to Ariele with the mother…), but above all the participation to the master's modules: she has *always been curious about food* and getting to know it at university made her *increasingly fascinated*.

But it is also true that in this contingency something just happens, which is not as easy to 'explain' as the above narrative would suggest. A very strong line of deterritorialisation:

Well then to tell you the truth at a certain point I left myself be taken over and I was almost going to enrol into a three years course to become a biodynamic farmer.

From a general interest, present and ascribable to her life assemblages, we witness here a radical rupture, an un-accountable event: Alberta's body is *taken over* by the intensity of an unforeseen occupation – *biodynamic farming*. I called this a "becoming-peasant", becoming-poor, out of a taste for rhetorical effect. This line is not mobilised by fascination for the alienated toil of the day labourer/sharecropper subdued by the power of a land-owner (not at all a "spectre" of capitalism but one of its central subjects). The point of attraction is rather a model of subsistence farming: the biodynamic farmer as ideal-type.

What I did want to emphasise with this 'extreme' word is the radical alterity and irreducibility of this kind of rural life to 'industrial' modes of living (rural and urban)[131]. By seeing ecosystems as made of interconnected and mutually constituting elements, the (ground) philosophy at the heart of biodynamic farming (*anthroposophy*) constructs a circular model of agriculture that aims at better integrating human practices within the

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[131] This does not mean that biodynamic agriculture as practiced nowadays is straightforwardly alternative to capitalism (see Breda 2016).

functioning of ecosystems and challenges land exploitation on the premise that human and non-human vitality are co-implicated (Breda 2016). Many of the categories that sustain our "ecological rift" are also recast (e.g. the binary between objects of use and waste[132]). Against deadening industrial modes[133], biodynamic agriculture proposes a life-affirmative approach that is both concrete and committed to respect natural limits – hence (at least ideally) at odds with the abstract imperatives of market exchange and profit.

Reterritorializing on such an economy would involve a life-changing transition: away from paid labour for consumption and its rigidly codified organisation of time, market provision, relationship to nature as (an-)other piece of 'leisure' (car trips and fuel, sporting equipment, internet guides…); nature becoming *integral* to (everyday) life: a line of flight from well organised assemblages of 'affluence' to become-plant, become-insect, become-imperceptible. From the hygienic cleanliness of a house with white interiors to the muddy sensuousness of the soil[134]. And yet…

A: so why did you give up?
Al: because well first of all because I received this offer for the internship
A: ah
Al: and then it felt such a <u>big thing</u>. Because for three years you were to… let's say… you lived in different farms for three years. […] So I mean… quite tough! And I got a bit anxious

Alberta *got a bit anxious*. She explains she does not mind leaving her *bonds here*, but she is held back by preoccupation for her *horse*, which she does not want to leave[135].

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[132] This is both <u>materially</u> and <u>discursively</u> true in as far as agricultural by-products of no use to human beings are employed within the circular economy of the farm to care for animals, who transform it back into usable matter for humans (e.g. food, wool). As a biodynamic farmer once said to me, "there is no waste there, that's the message I try to get through to people".

[133] This attribute is warranted in as far as we have the evidences that mechanisation and energy-intensive synthetic fertilisers/GM crops/pesticides boost artificially (and short-term) productivity but in the medium-term they make the land sterile <u>and</u> production more insecure (see Shiva 2010).

[134] There is a sense in which this desire of poorness and destitution is also evident in her love choices and libidinal attraction to working-class men. For example, during our day together, we spent the whole night out because Alberta was chasing a guy. He is an Albanian worker who (literally) works in the warehouse <u>below</u> her office: a subterranean, an immigrant.

[135] Alberta has got a horse and has been practicing hurdle-jumping for many years (which is how we met when we were young). This passion and her relationship to her horse (as

As we proceed with the interview, though, we recognise that other things are also at stake. At a first glance, it seems it is the bare fact of becoming a farmer, opening to the unknown, to be so anxiety-provoking to fold her line of becoming back on familiar territories (geographical but especially social). But…

A: but this course scared you also for the life choices you would have in case needed to make or…
Al: yeah, because in the end if I must think about working in the fields… ten hours a day… I mean in the end, you wake up at five in the mor--- now, I mean, I don't know really, but I imagine: you wake up at five in the morning, six, seven… well not much later than seven I would expect! And… I mean there can be the sun and 40 degrees, or raining, or minus 10… you need to be out there anyway aaaand I mean it's very hard and I mean you get back home in the evening and, what do you do? I mean I think you'd be dead tired[136]
A: mh
Al: aaand I mean, I thought I – that then maybe… in the end, they have put a bit this idea in my mind because the people I was talking to for this course they told me "look, it's not all a bed of roses"
A: mh
Al: I mean they've done that on purpose to make me understand that I mean… it's not that you go there to pick up flowers…!
A: mh mh, mh mh
Al: they… maybe in the end they were right. At the beginning I was a bit baffled I mean… I mean I was quite sure! [I laugh] And they…
A: and they…!
Al: they were warning me like that. But evidently I mean they, being more experienced than me, they wanted to make me understand "look, this is a decision that, if you decide to make it, you are advised on what you are going to face, because we want committed people: we don't want to risk that after six months you change your mind…!"

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a vegetarian) would again deserve a reflection on its own, which there is no space for here.

[136] Notice this is the same expression Erika used while talking about the after-work feeling: alienated labour being, in transversal and collective assemblages, a practice that by draining energy also <u>*deadens*</u> life (and desire).

From this extract, which was worth quoting and length, we see, on the one hand, Alberta drawn into peasant-ness, attracted by the intensity of bodies, discourses and affectivity of farmers (encountered and imagined). On the other, there are the *they*: the people from the course. *They* are part of a productivist, efficient, machine that cannot afford to take on board the 'wrong' person (who would lower the level and credibility, as well as the yield, of the course). The course organisers construct for Alberta a subject position that reterritorialises her Self into the (middle-class) person that, by virtue of her socio-economic background and previous education[137] she is socially supposed to be: a flower-picking young woman in a bed of roses, "American Beauty" style. Through practices of signification, they claim to be representing (using expertise and experience as proof, legitimisation) a solid reality: the hard labour of the fields. They make her *understand* and this reality soon become 'hers':

I started thinking in a more lucid way… I said to myself "I mean Alberta do you wanna stay in the fields for ten hours a day…?"

Being *lucid* and rational implies reproducing social expectations and actively assigning her-self to its socially sanctioned place. Further, by looking at things in a more lucid way, Alberta is almost left to wonder why a becoming-peasant was so much desired in the first place. It is as if the intensity that biodynamic agriculture held for her had suddenly vanished. How did that happen?

I have argued that biodynamic farming mobilised a line of flight because it embodies an imaginary that is irreducible to capitalist organisation – economically, affectively, at the level of everyday life. In its assemblages, work is part of being alive. Enjoyment and pleasure, no longer relegated to enclosed spaces of free time and leisure (consumption), are integral part of the care and loving attention for the land, the plants, the animals – physical effort itself becoming part of this enjoyment. But after she talks to the course providers, such virtual alternative crumbles. And my contention is that one of the reasons this happens is that biodynamic farming is reterritorialised along the pathways of a capitalist way of intending nature and labour. We start to see this from the extracts above: work is something 'out there', a toil that takes away time and energy for the 'proper life', which is relegated to the bounded space-time of leisure-*home*. It is *hard*, especially because *with organic and biodynamic agriculture is not that you use the tractor*

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[137] One of their problems was her degree in Modern Languages – which implied that she did not have enough experience 'in the field' (both literally and metaphorically!).

that much: *you do a lot of things manually*. Spending physical energy on labour is undesirable if seen from the typically capitalist/industrialist love for mechanisation.

Further, work-nature is dichotomised from leisure-nature: after talking to the course providers, Alberta 'realises' that although she likes *being in nature*, *there's a difference between being in nature* in the way we normally do – like going out for a walk – and *working in the fields*. *Nature* is not that co-constitutive element of (re)production it could have been in another economic/logic system: it is objectified as an 'other', enjoyable in as far as it is consumed. Finally, agricultural production, from *idyllic* being-with-nature, reverts to an instrumental practice where the focus, and the *satisfactions*, are in the end products instead of the process: hence natural irreducibility and lack of control are experienced as frustrating: *it's a job that gives you long-term satisfactions and sometimes it does not even give you any! 'Cause maybe you work for six months to see your yields, you say "well now I'm going to harvest!" and you get hail and… goodbye yield!*

Again pointing to the embeddedness of 'private' lines in collective assemblages, this reterritorialization is not only and not mainly 'hers'. Rather, it can be seen as part of a wider process whereby biodynamic agriculture is being mainstreamed, institutionalised, caught up in the capitalist machine. Increasing circulation of 'green commodities'; spread of sustainability concerns; marketing; small and locally-based shops like Ariele becoming big national companies with warehouses, trucks along motorways, standardised shops; multinationals producing the biodynamic compounds for big biodynamic farms; etc. – all this implies that anthroposophy can be, and is, at least in part, reconciled with the capitalist economy. With it, the desires traversing Alberta are swept back to molar territories. Partially, it is this becoming familiar of radical otherness that is responsible for its losing intensity. It is no longer a flight: only becoming a peasant – like you would become an office worker, a factory worker, a teacher… plus the physical effort and the uncertainty.

Hence, it could reasonably be argued that what cuts the line of flight is not so much anxiety deriving from radical alterity, but rather the fact that the alternative constructed for Alberta is not radical enough. By being incorporated into familiar dispositives, biodynamic agriculture did not in the end provide the conditions for that becoming-soil, becoming-rock, becoming-insect, becoming-plant, becoming-imperceptible that moved her in the first place… and lost all its allure. And instead of going along her line of flight, Alberta…

…ended up walking surefooted at EcorNaturaSì: both as a 'green' consumer and as an employee. Now, every day, she wakes up early in the morning, at 6 a.m.[138]; enters her brand-new car at 7 a.m., puts some commercial music on at loud volume – *not least to keep awake!* –, drives to work (35 kilometres back and forth); works in the office devoted to relationship with buyers; has lunch in the canteen to avoid the daily kilometre rate becoming 70; at 6 p.m. she leaves the office and either goes to her horse or directly home… her white, clean and tidy home. When I met her, she was due to leave soon for a holiday in Sardinia (by plane) *and, let me tell you, I really look forward to that.*

(partial) reterritorialisation.

But the line of flight has left its traces in the molecularity of life experiments, changed sensitivities, reflexivity on energy practices, embodied responses that carry part of its intensity. Parsimony in the use of energy and resources, avoidance of waste, are good examples. A bodily tension moves her to almost physically reject the sight of the small wasteful practices that people around her engage in –

The tap turned on while my ex-boyfriend was brushing his teeth
People who leave the water running while they are putting the shampoo on

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[138] Just like a farmer.

The central heating turned on in the bedroom
The car turned on, while you are not moving

These are all images that Alberta produces in a brief turn of conversation during our interview. This proliferation points to a libidinally charged position of *being careful with all of these things* – possibly a trace of the becoming-peasant. But this mode of desiring is not simply 'personal'[139]: it is part of an emergent and collective "structure of feeling" (Williams 2013) that is very much part of our times of crisis where resource and money scarcity produce a certain attentiveness to waste. And it can surely be argued that, from this position, some little and banal saving practices are fetishized in the face of a whole unsustainable and energy-intensive everyday life that remains in place. But this is not a personal failure: the point is that libidinal pulls, within familiar socio-material assemblages, leave only a limited capacity for 'sustainable' change, so they cannot be reshaped by an act of will.

What Alberta nonetheless manages to effectively accomplish is a "texturing" (Thomas et al. 2016) of her new sensitivities (e.g. dislike for waste) in novel material and semiotic assemblages. For instance, now that she is committed to avoid all that is superfluous, she <u>*buys much less*</u> – especially clothes and other accessories.

Al: 'cause, in the end, I mean, I have been opening my wardrobe and telling to myself: do I really need more stuff? I mean, I already have a lot… I mean, maybe I have been seeing things that I liked, but it was not that I felt like: "oh no that T-shirt is just too nice, I must have it!". I mean… I used to be a bit like that before.
A: mh mh
Al: I mean: I like something? Okay, I buy it, who cares. Whereas now, I mean, before buying anything I ask myself: do I really need it? I mean, do I really need this thing to to… to feel better with myself? Then anyway, I mean, I would buy something in case I say okay I need a pair of new sandals… that's fine. But I mean mmmm I always ask myself a few questions before buying anything.

Alberta is here constructing an account of a rather sharp transition between a 'before', in which commodities seem to exert almost irresistible power over her body – so that the libidinal flows end up in almost uncontrolled purchase of the new, the sensual, the

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[139] Noticeably, during the interview I resonate with her as she talks about these wasteful practices: *yeah that drives me mad as well*, I said.

conspicuous – and an 'after', which is now, in which her drive towards commodities loses force.

In some ways, this change is not that clear-cut. The light thrill of excitement at the idea of roaming around shops, touching new clothes and getting in contact with the latest fashions on the market, which I could sense during our day together[140], bears the signs of a continuing libidinal attraction towards consumption objects. This was also evident to me when she mentioned a newly bought pair of sandals for a few times before bringing me to the wardrobe where all the shoes of the family lay in order; showing them to me almost like a child would do with a new game. Indeed, the *need to feel good, aesthetically speaking, with myself – in any case* through bodily/aesthetic care is recurrent and signals her subjectification/subjection via a machine of "faciality". She recalls Erika in this, and interestingly, many are the assemblages they share, small gestures, ways of saying, rejected objects. An organisation of the Self that passes, in both cases and ritually, in front of *the mirror*: Erika, stopping by one each time she needs to go out in order to fix her make-up; Alberta, admitting that *if I look at myself in the mirror and don't like myself... it's traumatic!* Like Erika, Alberta likes to remark that even at home *I don't go around with the hair pin and... my father's tracksuit!* She also shares with our older participant a commitment for being the 'right' middle-way: *I'm not one of those people who does not go out of the house without the make-up on [...] yeah, the right middle way. I mean, I care about it, but without driving myself crazy.* Both are also ambivalent towards Self-care: necessary but laborious and *a waste of time*[141].

The difference between Erika and Alberta is nonetheless that the latter, through commitment to sustainability and un-wastefulness, relativizes the importance of this care for the self-body – allowing for desire not to be as much caught up by the molar imperatives to consume and be (conspicuously) fit. In other words, a tension to respect non-human nature brought with it the potency to enact critique (though partial): the refusal to "desire like that", we might say paraphrasing Foucault (2007: 44). Yet, more than a reflexive and agentic taking control (see Butler et al. 2014), Alberta's newly established regime of 'austerity' seems a further product of collective lines and

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[140] We drove to Conegliano first to a shopping mall and later in the historic centre because she needed a bra and a T-shirt. But, as she likes to remark, *it was a long time since I last went shopping*.

[141] Sometimes self-care even becomes an impediment to socialisation, like when she admitted that she was not comfortable going to the seaside for a day with some friends, because the length of the hair on her legs was such that they were visible and yet impossible to wax.

"machines" of desire. 'Sustainability' cuts and channels libidinal desiring flows away from commodities and towards self-limitation and parsimony, a careful economy of time and money – which is no less desiring, no less libidinal, not even less material. Its gestures, inventive ways of manipulating matter, interpretations are affectively charged and simultaneously enjoyed not despite but because of their being less materialistic. For instance, there is a sort of subtle pride and pleasure in showing what she has come up with to wash her long and generous hair without wasting: she pours a very little quantity of shampoo into a small plastic flask and mixes it with water before applying it; this is a way of producing more foam and better distributing the detergent on the hair – so that a small quantity is enough. As she explains me, this practice, which is desiring and productive, allows her to save both matter and money.

And surely, her having become *a little bit of a saver* can be seen as part of the entrepreneurial assemblages that partly made the economic fortune of the North East – save money, work, increase value…: a reterritorialisation along the lines of capital, a sort of "Protestant Ethic" (Weber 2010) revisited. Yet, at least to a certain extent, saving seems to work differently. For it is not done for its own sake but with the aim *to do something that fulfils me more.* For instance, she values the idea of spending money to socialise (like going out with a friend) and time to read or go out for a walk; while she feels that spending on *two packets of candies* or *wasting time in front of the TV* is pointless. Saving and parsimony are thus vehicles of life fulfilment rather than moral imperatives. Putting limits, furthermore, has the effect of freeing up space and energy for desire. Alberta for instance talks to me about the liberating feeling of eliminating, after reading Marie Kondo's "The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up", so much 'stuff' that was literally occupying her life space and making her desire stick to a heavy and burdensome past. By getting rid of objects, she was able to open up a desiring space made of fewer objects and more experimentation, new relationships, fresh air: *I started feeling the need to go out*, and left the wasteful boyfriend.

The "affective atmosphere" (Anderson 2009) of being-in-crisis was critical for such a transition, despite the financial crisis not having impacted on her family in significant ways. She agrees that the current, precarious, conditions have at least partly determined her life choices:

Al: I mean, as I was telling you earlier, in the end the fact of not wasting, of not throwing away... I mean, of not throwing away things that are still usable, of not buying

anything that all in all you don't need, accumulating, filling yourself up with things you don't need… I mean, it does in part also mirror the economic aspect, of everything
A: mh
Al: and also the aspect of pollution, sustainability… all of these issues… I mean, the fact of having a lifestyle that could have an impact… that is as little as possible, it already makes a great difference
A: mh
Al: but, shrinking a bit your environmental footprint[142]*, yeah, that. It all comes together to a certain extent, it's all… all linked up, absolutely.*

Alberta links very closely issues of economy and ecology, when referring to the financial crisis. Although she does not identify the economy as the main factor responsible for environmental degradation, the fact that economic precariousness implies, for her, a need to be more parsimonious signals a lack of faith in the ability of this economic system to overcome both crises. The implicit (?) link she makes between resource scarcity / ecological fragility on the one hand and money scarcity on the other might thus be seen as expression of a structural challenge to capital as self-perpetuating, unquestionable and all powerful, "full body". The fragility that the crisis makes evident is such that capitalist dispositives become less effective in organising everyday life assemblages. This suggests that the crisis might indeed be an 'accelerator' of transitions and change by letting desire move more easily along molecular, minor, lines.

True, this "supple segmentarity", compared to the line of flight of the becoming-peasant, "is only a kind of compromise operating by relative deterritorializations and permitting reterritorialisations that cause blockages and reversions to the rigid line" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 205). But we should not conclude that this is a necessarily undesirable outcome. Too fast a deterritorialisation can be dangerous in itself, because it can lead desire to annihilation (Deleuze and Guattari 2014). Deterritorialising movement needs its counterpart – territories – to work. In this sense, the reterritorialisation on rather

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[142] Alberta's talk is here clearly infiltrated by institutional assemblages of 'sustainability' through the expression of *environmental footprint*: a discourse premised on binaries between self/other (it can be assessed on individual bases) and human/environment (the effect that I have on the planet); on (anthropocentric) notions of human activity / material passivity (individuals as singular bodies generate a presumably lasting, calculable impact on the earth, while hidden remain the environment's effect on me or, better, the fact that trans-human bodies are continuously and mutually affecting each other). Yet, this discourse produces, beyond itself, response-ability in ecological processes of assembly, as we see from Alberta's emerging sensitivity to energy-matter.

mainstream ‘green consumption’ assemblages works like a comfortable space that allows her to experiment and keep desiring. This is well expressed by the image of “energy” that she articulates during the interview. Energy as *water*[143]: *this idea of water pushing you, of the force of water*. Like *when you go with your legs into a river and you feel the current that pushes you in one direction, and you go against the current*. This *gives you a little bit of a boost*, a pleasant sensation of *showing you have the force to do that.* To stand, like this lighthouse *hit by a storm on the cliff.*

And yet, she soon recognises that being able to do so also depends on moments of *turning and going with the current*, feeling *that water pushes you*, you are *helped in your own path*, *cradled*. Spending life *making an effort to do things that maybe you wouldn’t naturally do… it would be more difficult and surely you would also succeed less*: the molecular space of “compromise” is one where energy is economised and re-distributed. Here, Alberta can work with(in) her own thresholds of sustainability: respecting desire while simultaneously *pushing* it in new, bearable, directions.

Hence, for the future, she imagines living independently, maybe sharing a house as she feels the need to be with someone, *getting back from work and finding someone*

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[143] Very interestingly, this is also what Erika said; both of them also mention *taking a shower* as an instance in which water gives energy. Another young woman, Chiara, whom we will meet later, mentioned water as part of her images of energy. For all three, *water* refers to both a natural and unbounded element and something that human beings regiment, use, consume. Interestingly, though, Chiara and Alberta both mention the fact that water can be put to use as a sustainable energy source. This signals how their energy assemblages are being more incisively shaped by wider assemblages that have to do with resource depletion and environmental crises. For Erika, water remains something that is good for her but which at the same time *can be very destructive*, like with floods. As the energy assemblages through which her life moves were territorialised in times of abundance and optimism, the push to see water as renewable resource is for her less pressing, less forceful. It might finally be interesting to report that Salleh (2017: 210) reports that “[i]n the positivist unconscious, time flows, femininity and water are wedded at many levels”: by identifying energy and water, the three reproduce their ‘minor’ subject position – not necessarily to reactionary effects…

there. She would like to live in a rural environment, distant from roads with their traffic. She plans to be *less lazy*, use the car less, cycle more, walk more. She recognises not to be very good at this, but it is as if she was giving herself the time to be ready to maybe give up the car altogether – in the meantime trying to cut down on superfluous commuting. She would like to change her relationship to horse-riding, giving up hurdle jumping, having a different horse, who could live more simply and go on walks with her – but this needs to wait, for her horse's body is still there, needs care, cannot be disposed of. Her process of change also involves a search for sociality and sharing: to *invite people around more often*, *being more convivial*. And despite a potentially radical and libertarian discourse (conviviality) is again inflected in assemblages that were already part of her life (the meals with friends that her parents organise), this opening can also be seen as a difference-in-repetition, the starting point for new relationalities to emerge. It is a process, that involves respecting desires even when they are irreducible to value systems – acceptance of complexity.

Compared to Onurbio and Erika, the reterritorialisations that follow the flight have more productive implications. This happens as Alberta is more forcefully drawn by the intensity of alternative social machines – limit, post-material prosperity, respect for ecosystems. Her young age maybe, the suppleness of lines of desire, the financial and environmental crises, the increasingly circulating discourses of sustainability, the formal education at University, which made her knowledgeable about the dynamics of our socio-natural metabolism… all work to this effect. She, like Onurbio, talks about *doing my bit* in terms of environmental action. Nonetheless, this individual effort works with a logic of deeper hope and belief, in turn co-emerging with the felt presence of a collective scape (and scope) of change that continuously vitalises practices towards different and more ecological assemblages.

6.2. Second line of becoming: becoming-animal

> *The German preromantic Karl Philipp Moritz feels responsible not for the calves that die but before the calves that die and give him the incredible feeling of an unknown Nature—*affect*? For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel. Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one's bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? A fearsome involution calling us toward unheard-of becomings.*
>
> Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 240)

6.2.1. The (un)bearable lightness of the woods I

Not long ago we left Onurbio – his Self: white, adult, man, human, (more or less) rich, standing against a mountain landscape:

Unruly desires for *fresh air* found their channelling in the consumption of energy intensive *enjoyments*. The narrative might have ended here, but there is something that unsettles all this…

In climbing the hill, we walk along a fenced wood. But there is a hole in the fence from which, in autumn, deer often come out and graze on golf courses – you can see them often. And also their "residues". Onurbio says that that wood must also be attractive for golf balls: they always fall inside!

There must have been an intensity about that wood, its dimly-lit shadows, to make me take this rather unremarkable photograph. Being drawn towards that molecular, supple, obscurity (it is not completely obscure, light infiltrates) was probably a flight from the molar organisation of space of the golf course, the enlightened opening of its anthropomorphic nature. Me becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible – willingness to leave 'the role of researcher' (and the boredom of following a golf training) to disappear in the woods, with the deer, mushrooms, moulds, pine needles. But things might not be too different for Onurbio, as he roams around apparently well settled into his individuality of rich white man. Each time we see even the sign of a deer he starts: *look there!* And during the interview, his exhortation for me to notice a pack of deer who suddenly come into view – *quick, film them!*

And yes, admittedly, the deer running across the golf course might look like reassuring sources of an almost narcissistic enjoyment of nice little animals, wild but tamed, there for our entertainment (see Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 241). But I believe the animal is also always something else, more and less: the carrier of the wild life in the woods, unknown – that minor, smooth, surface of the world that attracts even civilised golf balls. In his becoming-deer Onurbio was affected by an a-human intensity, his Self displaced from the centre of the golf course towards the shadows where identification becomes difficult. In becoming-tree, becoming-moss, becoming-insect, but also becoming-object (a golf ball that flies and disappears…) his humanity is uprooted towards a force of pure becoming. Affect. Becoming-imperceptible. In these occasions, if for fleeting moments, "*unnatural participation*" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 258) with non-human entities happens…

There are many instances of becoming-animal with Onurbio. He tells me he gave up buying water in plastic bottles from the supermarket. He now goes to the Council's dispensers instead:

I don't want to say that it's money you save, but... you've got these images, right? Of turtles and fishes with plastic in their mouths, bottles abandoned on the beaches… all of those things[144].

Becoming-fish, becoming-turtle, becoming-beach. In these zones of proximity, the affective intensity of the Onurbio-animal-plastic assemblage foregrounds a sustainable transition in everyday water assemblages.

Unemployment, hence the crisis, are central to this transition. Having less money to spend made Onurbio more careful with his purchases. *How much money out of the water price are we spending for the water and how much for the packaging? Well, more for the packaging!* Onurbio realises that he is spending more on what he is then disposing of and finds this absurd. Yet, he himself underscores that saving money is probably the least significant thing about this new practice; for the money he saves there he might well be spending the minute after on some silly thing. The point is rather that saving money exceeds itself and affords a renewed sensitivity to wastefulness and waste production through consumption. Decreased income produces a breach in the repetition of habitual gestures, which can be questioned.

Through the evident and palpable materialisation of wastefulness in money expenditure and in the mouth of fishes, industrial systems' often irrational patterns of energy use became suddenly visible. Other elements intervened: events, material affordances, discourses, media images and personal trajectories. His wife had already sensitised him to the world of PET (machines, caps, transportation, distribution, disposal…) behind the water bottles in supermarkets because she works for an industry that produces bottle moulds. There also was the Council's resolution to establish the dispensers in the first place – a decision that was in turn guided by a need to shrink wasteful production/distribution of water in plastic bottles and to give people the opportunity to have pure water without the need to buy it from the supermarket[145]. These

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[144] From this extract we appreciate that media are crucial to creating the possibility of ecological affections; and this raises further questions as to their force: can mediated experience of degradation foreground more ecological sensitivities? is this possible within commodified, spectacularised, overcrowded regimes of media communication?

[145] This was itself a culturally and socially mediated need: the fastidiousness of most people in our area to tap water (despite it being quite good compared to most tap waters) combining with a growing emphasis on the unhealthiness of the chlorine that is used in order to sanitise water (and this in turn we can see as largely driven by corporate interests in selling expensive water purifiers to households). The council's decision might also be seen as a "nudge" strategy for incentivising people to avoid buying water from the supermarket. This would suggest that institutional initiatives might be ecologically

became known and legitimised to Onurbio at a family dinner, when his brother-in-law served water from the public dispensers – which he liked. Yet, these elements (forming some kind of potentiality) remained latent and did not mobilise any change until certain conditions coalesced and made it more vivid, affectively relevant. Onurbio, in fact, did not choose to switch to council's water until one day he went to the supermarket and, looking at the bottles, he realised how wasteful they were. Not so much a calculation or choice but an *event*: a realisation in a zone of proximity – becoming-bottle.

Simultaneously, acquiring the habit of going to the public dispenser also required certain conditions to be in place, among which, again, unemployment:

even if it is a "bit of a pain in the ass", going there once every two or three weeks to get six bottles of water "is not that bad". And now that he has got the time… he does it with pleasure.

Having *time* allows Onurbio to engage in low-energy practices, while the hectic rhythms of working life did not: he can go to the dispensers, cycle to the supermarket – which, he tells me, is also a good exercise for his body and thus health… Above all, having *time* means slowing down perception, consciousness and affects. This makes him capable of trans-human proximity and participation that render the world (and not only his Self) intense. Becoming-fish, becoming-deer, becoming-bottle… strike him with all the power of the nature we are part of, so that he can conclude that *it's just us who must do something to help it, this ecosystem!*[146]

This realisation has prompted him to make changes to his everyday life habits. They are small, and questions remain about how to make them more pervasive. This is difficult to say for sure at this stage. What we can say is that the changes happening are mobilised not so much by moral imperatives (although the ethical commitment to *help*

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positive and productive if textured with-in a number of further socio-economic assemblages that are both small- and large-scale – ranging from everyday life arrangements to a changing world economy.

[146] Admittedly, there is an anthropocentric flavour to this statement, for it presumes human beings to be both the ones who damage and save the earth. This discourse is quite popular nowadays, circulating especially via media. Yet, in the context of this exchange, the emphasis lays more on the fact that responsibility for change should not be continuously deferred to other (more powerful) people but embodied in our everyday activities. A dynamic that testifies once more our being 'spoken by' (rather than autonomously speaking) collective assemblages; and yet, it also suggests that they are not-enough with respect to the complexity of affective experience, which always exceed them.

ecosystems <u>is</u> present) or rational choices (money saving) as by affective intensities and zones of proximity: the sorrow of encountering animal bodies destroyed by bad encounters with human waste. These have the potential to open a horizon of affective (re)connection with the ecological challenges of our present. By making evident human beings' inextricable embeddedness in ecologies, they rupture unsustainable everyday habits and make difference emerge from repetition.

6.2.2. The (un)bearable lightness of the woods II

There, surrounded by the snow, it was probably one of the few moments throughout the whole day in which I was not feeling cold. After lunch, Valerio[147] and I drove 15 km from his house to this place, skirting a lake for a bit and then climbing a very steep and bendy road[148]. It was February and nobody was around. We set off the car and started walking along the track. I certainly did not have the right shoes on. But moving after having been in the heated car was bringing some life to me, some warmth. I had arrived at his house at 6 a.m. and we already had a walk through snowy woods back then. Since that moment, I could not get warm again. His house and his artist studio were cold – 15° C, maybe less. We had not moved much. My body was tired. When I went home, that night, I took a long hot bath.

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[147] Pseudonym suggested by participant.

[148] I know this place very well – it holds many memories: there is my poor grandad's mountain cottage in this area; I used to come here especially when I was a child. A strange coincidence. During the summer tourists and hikers populate this place; there is a mountain restaurant close by. When I was a child, it was simply a hut where they produced cheese and butter with the milk from the few cows living in the grassland around – the yellowest and tastiest butter I have ever eaten. Now, thanks to some money from the EU, the place has lost much of its rural and almost archaic allure after being enlarged and modernised to become a popular restaurant. More lucrative, less ecological. I no longer know where the cheese and meat they serve comes from now, what the animals eat, what hands manipulate them. But this is another story…

But back to the woods, back walking:

We stop to look at the footprints that a hare has left by jumping from one side to the other of the path. I can hear the noise of our steps on the snow. [...] Then, we come across a trail that from the wood zig-zags across the path and goes back to the wood again; we think it must have been a rather big quadruped, something like a deer, who was following a smell. Valerio lingers quite a lot, trying to measure it and understand what it is. He uses his body to mimic the possible movements of the animal; puts his feet on the footprint, following its supposed steps. I am anxious because I am afraid to get cold. We spend almost two minutes there. He likes footprints, I can tell.

Valerio becoming-animal. And not because he imitates the movements of the deer who crossed the path. It is, again, a matter of "*unnatural participation*", an a-symmetrical block of becoming between a civilised body and an animal body: the man gaining the heightened sense of smell of the deer, its sweeping steps, wildness; but the deer already becoming something else – a unicorn maybe, a literary fancy[149]. The molar body of a white adult man following a line of flight out of the striated space of civilisation, towards the smoothness of a BwO – flaky, malleable, changing, vanishing… – like the surface of the snow; or a plane of cosmic immanence, acceleration, pure becoming where imagination becomes real, humans become animals… or imperceptible.

But, as *we resume walking*, we start to realise that this smooth space is also striated:

He thinks what we do is transmitted to our children. For this reason emperors in the past and powerful people today are committed to keeping most people in miserable conditions: it is a way to imprison them in those conditions for generations. [...] In his opinion, anyway, in the case of human beings this thing of the genes is not very determinant because our rational brain is taking over our animal and deeper being: to him, even the fact that one kills himself because the girlfriend left him is the outcome of this abuse of

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[149] *Valerio has got a dream, for his life: to see an animal, the Narwhal, which is a fish; it is a sort of swordfish but it has on its head an ivory horn, like that of the Unicorn – which we think is only myth. He explains that he saw some of these horns in the house of a very wealthy friend whose father owned steelworks and had a passion for exploration. So he would like to go to the island where the Narwhal lives, in Siberia*. Interestingly, this *dream* resonates with the narrative of Melville's *Moby Dick*, where Captain Achab chases another cetacean – a whale, this time. Deleuze famously used the relationship between the two as an instance of becoming (see Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 42).

power that the rational brain perpetrates over the instinctual, which instead would command self-preservation. Most people are not happy because they are not able to have sex properly, and this is the result of family and social morals.

Animals, emperors, primitives, civilised, priests, chromosomes… Valerio's world is populated by Chinese people, shamans, barbarian populations and Romans, bacteria, alchemists, farmers, multinationals, rocks, artist friends, genius scientists, trees, vegetables, digital cameras, a car, Victorian age books, fabulous beasts, explorers, gallerists, librarians, two houses, exotic food, distant friends, two children… As the above extract from my fieldnotes shows, these tend to be divided into opposing binaries, and especially: powerful (rich) and miserable (poor); culture (rationality, civilisation, human beings) and nature (instincts, animals, primitives).

Desire is, in our assemblage of snowy woods, investing the animal-primitive, minor side of the binary: *instincts, animal and deeper beings, sexual power, life-preservation*. Animal-primitive is here the repository of a more direct, fuller, vital and intense relationship of bodies to themselves and to the rest of the world. Affective potency. Civilisation, with its morality (and molarity), introduces what for Valerio is a sorrowful division of human beings from their own nature. The hegemony of the civilised *rational brain* diminishes bodies' potency, to the point of annihilation (suicide). This process is put in motion by, and favours, those in power – for weak bodies mean enslaved and submitted subjects. Becoming-animal is thus a way for Valerio to flee this civilised *disgusting society* that diminishes what bodies can do, perverting their 'nature' in order to maintain hierarchies and power structures.

This peculiar 'love for nature' opens strange, and at times conflictual, possibilities. On the one hand, it entails opportunities for sustainable transitions. Valerio recognises that civilisation's weakening of (putative) 'natural vitality' also produces, and rests on, ecological degradation

aquifer contamination, *nuclear pollution*, *oil spills*, *cancer*, *wars*, *burning of forests*, *hunt with repeating rifle*

Hence, civilisation (and especially <u>modern</u> civilisation) simultaneously threatens natural ecosystems' vitality <u>and</u> human beings. Becoming-animal is therefore a way of creating alliances among civilisation's oppressed, minor, collectives (human bodies, sexual drives, animals, fragile ecosystems, aquifers, woods, etc.), possibly in the interest of the pursuit of emancipatory flourishing. Such a desire for Life, potency and freedom pushes Valerio along the many ecological assemblages that have characterised his biographical trajectory: from green party activism when he was young, to present involvement in ethical purchasing groups[150], local direct consumption, self-production of food.

This is particularly evident in his embrace of organic food: *bio bio bio*[151], as he repeats throughout the day. For him, *bio* is a way of promoting both his own body vitality *to avoid poisoning myself, mainly* and to resist the deadly economies that damage ecosystems because *everybody wants to make profit, they pollute the aquifers* without thinking about the consequences[152]. Hence, ecological and political commitments *to change the economy* co-emerge. But very interestingly, Valerio does not construct them as a universal, abstract, duty: his resistance *is a personal thing*, it depends on his *disposition* and ideas about what is *a good life*. Consider this statement:

at the time of Tangentopoli… I could have made a huge quantity of money, but I preferred to remain poor and sleep at night…![153]

Like Erika said, it is better to be poorer but *sleep at night*. In both cases, we see money working very materially on bodies in the form of a restless disruption of natural bodily rhythms. And it is the body itself – its felt, affective, pushes – that takes the path of a life-affirmative respect of ecologies: it concretely demands vital sleep and pure aquifers against the abstract and deadly imperatives of money.

Valerio's 'conversion' to organic food, furthermore, is related to a very specific event:

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[150] The Italian acronym is GAS: Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale.

[151] This is a short way to say something is organic, in Italian; it stands for the longer "biologico".

[152] His preoccupation with the contamination of water and especially underground water recurs. This is probably related to when he started his job as geologist – Veneto was in an emergency in this regard because expanding industries were releasing toxic materials without much care. This fear of contamination also led Valerio to an environmentally virtuous initiative of promoting the implant of an infra-red water purifier for the community where he lives, to be installed on the local spring – *because the old one was cancer-causing*.

[153] He is referring to a historical turning point in Italian politics, happening between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when it became clear that corruption was endemic to Italian public administration and politics. Valerio is referring to the fact that before this event, he could have decided to collaborate with profit-seeking entrepreneurs, in exchange of money, to implement otherwise illegal projects.

He tells me that he has rediscovered a different and more natural way of eating since he moved here [his house in front of the lake, where he moved some 7 years ago]. Then he corrects himself, he's been careful with food for longer: he recounts me the episode of the steak his wife was cooking, in Belluno, one day when his children were still young. He was struck by the smell and by the fact that the steak was clearly shrinking, and yet, it was always the same, bought in the same place. So he asked his friend, who was a farmer – "who started becoming a friend since that occurrence", who explained to him about antibiotics and other supplements that are given to cows so that their bodies hold more water: since that moment, he gave up buying meat from that butcher. [...] All this was happening 20 years ago. But it all started by chance, "because before I would drink Coca Cola".

This extract makes clear how Valerio's turn to organic is premised upon the will to feed himself with lively, nutritious, matter: fleshy protein instead of artificially swollen steaks. There is also a sense in which the conditions of intensively farmed animals are seen as abhorrent – un-natural. Yet again, the giving up of industrial meat (and food in general) starts with an affective and sensuous – rather than deliberately moral – process, marked by the bodily encounter between Valerio's senses (smell receptors, eyes, brain) and the steak in the pan. It is a moment of rupture, an event that makes him pass a threshold between the normality of a civilised person (whose everyday life and stomach are populated by global multinationals) and one who eats in a way that is *a bit strange*, as he says. An uncanny sensation, a strange smell, triggered a becoming-animal, again – flesh, water, heightened capacity of smelling and seeing. From the repetition of daily routine (always the same meat, the same butcher), this event – sudden, inexplicable – sparked change, difference and a transition towards more sustainable eating.

This event, in and of itself, was necessary but nevertheless not sufficient for a lasting and sustained reshaping of food assemblages, which rested on a number of other conditions quite specific to (t)his life. First of all, the "good encounter" with the farmer, who acted as mediator for otherwise unavailable knowledge and insights[154] into food production. This encounter was in turn dependent upon Valerio living in a city that was (and still is) immersed in the rural landscape of mountain grasslands, rivers and fields, counting a long tradition of pastoralism and small-scale agriculture. This shaped the know-how, skills and critical stance of the then-to-become friend. Industrial food did

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[154] This would be somehow different nowadays, with internet and (social) media communication.

creep into the everyday gestures and kitchens of people in the area; yet, its material characteristics, by signalling their bad quality, also set in motion the search for local and fresh produce. That these were available allowed a productive (re)territorialisation to happen: going 'back' to the farmer – and yet differently.

Valerio repeatedly uses the verb *to rediscover*. It is not that he finds again something about himself: a whole bulk of old knowledge, rituals and food assemblages are (re)actualised – a becoming-past in which the past itself is deterritorialised. For instance, he would buy meat directly from the farmer and *keep the bones to make the stock*: a way of not wasting anything. In the past, this was a typical, spontaneous, frugal action practiced because of material deprivation. Now, it is the choice of a relatively affluent white man who starts to value (again) a more natural[155] way of eating. This difference-in-repetition is also open to exotic philosophies and eating practices that, imported from the Far East, contribute to the emergence of novel food assemblages under the sign of bodily flourishing. One of the things that most struck me was that he makes soy milk by himself at home, in the way some Chinese people taught him. He offered me some in the morning.

Now, the soy milk, together with my knowledge that the night before he was at some *vegan friends' house for dinner*, triggered a question:

I ask him whether he is vegetarian. No. To him, being vegetarian is something of a stretch and indeed, in China they recommend you eat everything, and that if you have a problem to a ligament it is natural to think that eating a ligament will help you. […] In the past, people used to eat the heart and the brain of enemies! He calls vegetarianism "a folly" because, sure, if you have animals "in your backyard" then affection comes in, but so also with plants "you start to stroke them" and with minerals: "as a geologist, I see that: I can see them being born, growing, dying". Like everything else. Because life springs from there… the bases of life are right at the level of energy. Energies, let's say, similar or diverse – whatever you prefer. But they unite and form matter. And matter is all the same, it works through attraction and forms animals and plants in the same way. And everything works like this. And everyone struggles with the neighbour for remaining alive". He has also got a friend, who was one of the first in the area to become a vegetarian, and he is white – he doesn't know whether he is albino or it is vegetarianism

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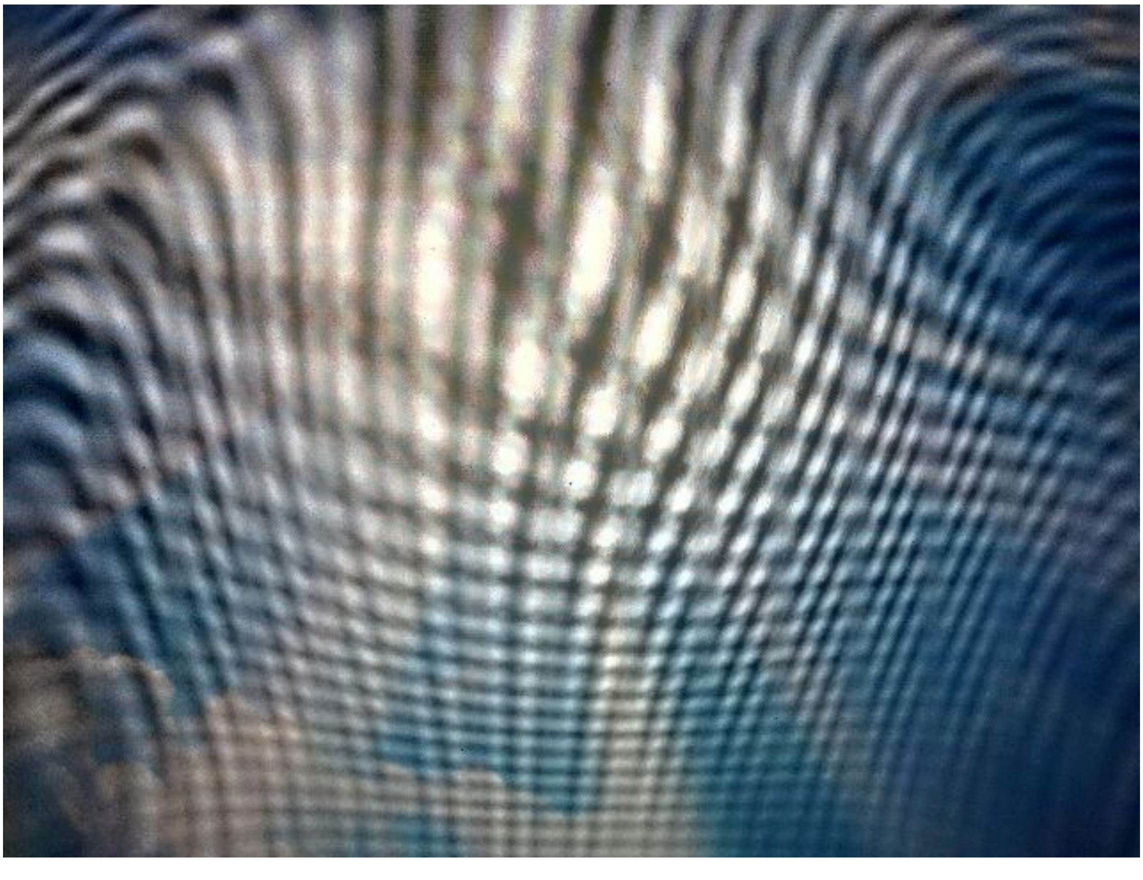
[155] Or should we say: animal?

to lead you to that. For him, it is not a very sensible idea: "I heard that also sexually speaking… they haven't got much… 'cause they also lack the drive…!"

Because vegetarianism is assigned to the side of civilisation and *morals* within Valerio's libidinal economy, it cannot but be a perversion of a more intense, original, natural and healthy way of eating. As such, it diminishes bodies' potencies, brings along disease, inhibits sexual desire, changes complexions, etc. Meat eating is therefore set within the scene of a becoming-animal – affirming 'nature' against the life-repressing morality of civilisation. This is not necessarily anthropocentric, though. For him, in fact, the legitimacy of eating animals is premised not on a nihilistic presumption of other species' arbitrary disposability, but rather on a vitalistic view of matter where energy forms a plane of immanence that puts all beings (rocks, plants, animals) on the same plane of Nature. This "flat ontology" defies the civilised segmentarities of nature/culture, organic/inorganic, animal/plant and the like towards the supple segmentarity of a world in a perpetual tension of becoming.



Energy is for me everything… the universe. And so I put this as an initial image for you like… like big bang or the energy that we do not see but is involving us… always… since 20 billion years ago.

But another, more obscure, side of this worldview starts to creep in – with ambivalent consequences in terms of ecology:

everything works like this
everyone struggles with the neighbour for remaining alive

Is this not the very basic assumption of modernity – that ‘nature’, as opposed to ‘culture’, is the sphere of struggle of all against all? Is this not the transfer of the capitalist-liberalist market logic onto nature? And, finally, does this not foreground a nihilistic view of life? In Valerio’s assemblages, concern over Life slips into an affirmation of human life at the expense of animals’ – who become disposable in the interest of healthy bones and good sex. There is a perpetual risk that the vitalist and joyful will-to-potency transforms in a will-to-power that is no more than individual affirmation. As if molecularity risked falling back surreptitiously on the very molarity that it challenges. This is the danger of a certain vitalism: that the nature|culture and human|animal dichotomies are falsely challenged by simply and confusedly denying their difference and simultaneously subsumed to a certain discourse of truth about what the world is – a metaphysics that is in the end the colonisation of ‘nature’ by our own social organisation.

Let us go back for a minute to where I started. I said I suffered much cold with Valerio. We went around the house in our coats for the whole day, and this was not even enough. I decided to enquire more on this during the interview, asking him whether he uses gas for heating. He confirmed, and jokingly remarked that nonetheless *I don’t heat! You saw that…* Now, the ecologically virtuous activity of keeping the house cold is, for him, *also* a matter of *saving money*. Yet, *really it is more about…* a *strengthening of the body.* In other words, cold sets in motion a becoming-animal, engagement with the wild intensities that pertain to ‘nature’ more than civilisation. In this sense, it is driven by a will-to-potency, a desire to build bodily strength as vitality[156]. But interestingly, Valerio adds:

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[156] That rational calculation around money saving passes into the background, by the way, questions neoliberal policies that hope to change behaviours through the implementation of financial measures.

I've always done this since I liked... since I read about explorations[157].

Now, these explorations are to a certain extent inescapably related to early-capitalist colonial expansion. This is not to say that one can straightforwardly equate exploration and imperialistic appropriation, for the knowledge of *otherness* that originates from these expeditions is <u>also</u> a (deterritorialising) means of better assembling with the world, opening to the new and unforeseen, experiencing radical irreducibility. Indeed, we can imagine extreme conditions producing for those explorers (they are mostly white men, at least in novels) lines of flight and moments of "unnatural participation": becoming-boar, becoming-plant, becoming-ice, becoming-storm. Still, one might argue that Valerio's practice of non-heating in the interest of bodily strengthening, as inspired by these novels, is partially striated along the pathways of planetary appropriation of which the early modern explorers in adventure books are almost mythical protagonists; always-already captured and reterritorialized onto the world-forming activity of capital, colonies, resource extraction and land exploitation: will-to-<u>power</u>.

These 'modernist' lines of desire shape Valerio's everyday energy assemblages very subtly but very potently. Valerio has travelled a lot throughout the world: to China several times; Brazil; Taiwan; US… you name it. His everyday life is shaped by a preoccupation about the next trip, the next discovery. Past explorers actualise in a present desiring pull for inter-continental trips (flights), the curiosity of discovery, the quest to 'know' the *other*. In a more banal way, this desire also shapes his use of the car. Car driving influences much of his everyday life assemblages[158] in a way that is libidinally

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[157] The theme of explorations must be intensive for Valerio, for it came up during our day of observation as well. See the following extract from my fieldnotes: *I ask him about his passion for travel and adventure – where does that come from: "I don't know ... the only thing is that I liked reading a lot". He remembers that when he was a 12-13-year-old boy he used to read Melville's* [again!] *books, and books about explorations. He used to hide under his blankets in bed, with a torch, otherwise his father would reprimand him for not sleeping. "I read so many books... that I liked, yes. Once, they were books about explorations: North Pole, South Pole, Livingstone... my desire of knowing other cultures comes from there...". This is why when he goes on holiday, nowadays, he stays for two-three days in hotels and then he tries and go to live with local people.*

[158] He lives in his current house not only because of the beautiful view on the lake, but also because *it is close to the motorway*; he enjoys recounting his long trips by car when he used to work as a geologist all over Italy; he takes pride of his skills as (fast) driver and has a very sensual and bodily drive towards the matter-car – which I could almost sense as he managed some difficult manoeuvres on the iced road; he drives miles and miles to go to cultural events and visit friends all over Italy; etc.

excessive like excessive is his telling me that *I used to drive 200-260 km/hr on motorways – and just because my cars were limited!*[159].

But again, this desiring excess is not 'his': the car is a socially constituted point of 'capture' for libidinal lines. Indeed, it has historically been one of the 'gadgets' to condense the spirit of modernism: acceleration, power, oil, big companies, velocity, flashes of light on highways… This libidinal charge is such that it stretches towards the future and even shapes high-energy imaginaries, made of *flying cars* fuelled with *petrol*[160], at the service of his desires of mobility. That there is an appropriative will-to-power inhabiting these assemblages is testified by the fact that, although aware of the polluting nature of his fanciful flying car, Valerio claims that it would not be possible for him to give it up because the desire to move is *part of me*, something natural[161]. In this, it becomes clear that his line of investment into 'nature' can promote molecular and creative desires as it can fall onto molar and rigid segmentarities: the voracious quest for technological enhancement at the service of libidinal pulls (and at any environmental cost).

In this context, living through the economic crisis has very ambivalent connotations. Valerio tells me that *I have been quite little affected because I had already decided to stop working two or three years ago, and so to decrease the level... my level of income.* As such, his life was already going in the direction of a 'molecular' downshifting: Valerio had decided to work less, consume less and live more. He then claims to have found *some advantages* in the crisis. One of these is that cheap clothes have become available and easy to find. Whereas before he would casually spend rather big amounts of money on them, he can now find *jeans for 8 euro, sneakers for 8 euro.* These, *you wear them... one year, throw them away.* This entails a sudden and unexpected twist: from the frugal and self-consciously simple (hence more sustainable) livelihood of a downshifter, to consumerism and disposability. The fact that he is ready to do so has to

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[159] Another micro-becoming-animal: an apparently molecular resistance to the molar rules of civilisation that command to drive slowly. Yet, again, this rather looks as a self-affirmation, will-to-power: affirming my right to adrenaline enjoyment irrespective of its dangerousness for others.

[160] It is interesting that when I mention *oil* he corrects me: *petrol*. He had just talked about *oil pollution* as being *the worse of all*. Hence the discourse was probably resisting going into the territory of *oil* use as desirable; *petrol*, I believe, works in this exchange as a sanitised version of *oil*.

[161] He just later talks about *chromosomes* determining one's propensity to move around or be still. It is interesting to notice how 'nature' is here mobilised to fix an identity and territorialise the Valerio-car assemblage.

do with the specific material qualities of those clothes – designed, produced and sold as deteriorating objects. But it is also produced by (and in turn reproduces) the logic of money which, as a general equivalent, turns all things into exchange values: a pair of jeans is evaluated in terms of relative cost and not use, affective attachment, energy and labour content. And the more costs shrink, the more things become disposable and reduced income produces a drive towards careless enjoyment.

Interestingly, Valerio's clothes ethics is very different from his food ethics. The latter are guided by a will to preserve/enhance body health and a more general commitment to ecosystems' vitality and producers' welfare. Saving money is not central[162]. Why does this not hold for clothes? A tentative answer is that the relationship between the human body and food is quite different from that with clothes: with food, there is ingestion, digestion, assimilation; a sensuous and intense engagement, pleasure, qualities of taste. Our body is in continuous and far more obvious exchange and co-emergence with particles of matter-food than those of matter-clothes – which tend to remain external to it (at least in our perception). But we saw that in Valerio's libidinal economy life-affirmation is first of all related to his own body: the supple line that threads through his life assemblages more easily falls into a will-to-power that promotes self- instead of life-affirmation[163]. As a consequence, the disposability of clothes is not problematized because only those matters that are more directly relevant to the Self come to matter, so to speak.

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[162] As he tells me, the prices of food bought through ethical purchasing groups or directly from local producers are certainly lower than in organic supermarkets, but *if you compare to stuff from supermarkets, like Iperlando… there's no comparison!*

[163] This is also supported by the fact that he grants emerging economies a 'right' over environmental degradation in the name of what is supposed to be *their turn* to appropriation within the voracious trajectory of global capitalism.

6.2.3. A doggy vitality, or: How to enjoy unemployment

A: eeehm okay. And so, by the way, talking about energy: if I just say "energy", what comes to your mind?
M: ah! Eheh… straightaway, personal energy.
A: oh good! Ah!
M: like this, straightaway. If you talk to me about energy… it doesn't come to my mind the energy of lights, of this… of the fridge, of the washing machine… personal energy
A: aaah! And and and… what do you mean by personal energy?
M: having the strength, having the will… not having the will – just having the strength, the energy of do--- of doing things. […] I mean… the energy that the little dog has [she indicates him while he runs along the track], of when you're twenty, the energy of having the strength to work, ehm… this.
A: yeah. And for example you, now, do you feel you have a good eeehm powerful energy, as a person, or not?
M: well considering all the conditions I have had I still have quite a lot of energy! [we both laugh]
A: so do you feel vital?
M: yes thank God! Otherwise…![164]

When I met Manuela, she was 57. She is a very outgoing woman, with an energetic tone of voice, a smile on her round and likable face. For five years now, she has been living in an old stone house in a hamlet among the woods of Vittorio Veneto: Borgo Maiola. As she is keen to underscore, her husband restored it with the help of some friends. What is very peculiar about this place is that it is not, as one would imagine, secluded and distant from everything. As Manu likes to repeat, the bendy road that climbs the hill gets you, by car, *in 10-15 minutes to the city centre, but just because you need to slow down because of the curves. It's close, it's 3-4 kilometres*. Furthermore, people always pass in front of the house (sometimes even too many!), because there is a path leading here from the nearby popular Sanctuary dedicated to Saint Augusta.

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[164] Manuela and her husband (Valerio, who is <u>not</u> the person I wrote about in the section above) always speak in dialect – albeit their dialect (especially Manuela's) is often infiltrated by Italian words and structures. It is most unfortunate that the affective qualities and peculiarities of this language are lost in translation more than with standard Italian.

Coming from a family of humble origins, Manuela has certainly needed much energy and strength to work throughout her life. She started when she was only 14 – first as a hairdresser and then as an auxiliary nurse in various institutions. Her husband started out as a factory worker but then decided to quit and work for a rich family who owns an estate in the countryside near Conegliano. They went living there. That was a very secluded place, with just a rural track to reach it. Manuela gave birth to their first and only child there, but after four years from his birth they *managed to save enough money to buy a house, she explains to me with pride*, and moved to an apartment in San Vendemiano – Valerio still working in the countryside and Manuela in Vittorio Veneto. This was *a life of many sacrifices*. They raised the child all by themselves, and so to make sure at least one of them was with him Manuela organised her shifts on Saturdays, Sundays, or during the night. Valerio and the son would come during weekends to what is now their house, but before was a just lodge; he entertained and cuddled him, even cleaned and changed him[165].

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[165] Something quite unusual to do for an average man in that period.

This effortful life wore her body out and was partly responsible, in time, of many health conditions and a number of surgical operations. The result of one of these is a metal plaque implanted into Manuela's neck, which makes her suffer from many pains and reduces her capacity to do work and carry out housework, which the doctor said she should avoid altogether. She is also impeded in walking and becomes tired very quickly[166]. In the light of this biographical trajectory, I will argue that moving from San Vendemiano to the stone house in Borgo Maiola can be fruitfully illuminated as a becoming-animal[167]: becoming-dog, becoming-the little pooch – that also entails a transition towards more economically and ecologically sustainable assemblages.

But let us start from before – from the flat in San Vendemiano. Although Manuela and Valerio construct a rather strong dichotomy between urban life there and rural living in Borgo Maiola, Manuela never truly repudiates the former[168]. She is indeed very keen to underscore that their flat in San Vendemiano is spacious and modern (at least for the time they bought it): *100 square meters, and the walls are 3 meters high!* She often

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[166] For instance, she agreed to walking for our interview *but only to up to the bend in the road*, which was quite close.

[167] Albeit in a way that is quite different from the becoming-animal just encountered.

[168] At times, it almost looks like Manuela moved here only because of Valerio's preference for the countryside. Mostly, though, Manuela talks as if both desired this. In any case, this is her house now – she has happily *adapted* to it.

mentions it, saying it is a *beautiful apartment*. An affective intensity is still circulating around this urban flat, which can be said to emerge from Manuela's biographical trajectory, in turn embedded in a socio-historical movement, regional and international.

Born in a working-class family in the valley just below Borgo Maiola, Manuela constructs the time when she was young as one of scarcity, especially for people in rural areas. And if, on the one hand, this lead to a wiser and more careful use of local resources, it also implied rivalry, misery, fatigue. The woods that encircle us now used to be pastures for animals. People used them, including her grandmother and aunt, working manually and meticulously to get the most out of them: *they used to cut the grass with "the sickle! ...my grandma and my auntie would quarrel on a bunch of grass!"*. This completely changed since the 1960s, with the boom of industrial development reshaping the configuration of the North East. More and more people were attracted to wage labour in the industrial and third sector. The countryside was progressively deserted for the more secure income of the factory, generating increasing dependence on the market for everyday living. Simultaneously, industrialisation brought an increasing quantity of (cheap) commodities to an increasing number of people.

This process is never criticised by Manuela, who also participates to those assemblages that equal 'progress' with industry-led material affluence. For her, between the past and the present, one of the positive changes has been…

M: well all the wellbeing that has come! Eeeeeh all the… the technology! This you can't say that it is not… the fact that now you can afford that once there was a car per family and now instead you have one that's yours, another for the son, another for the husband… yeah, wellbeing… the telly, despite – with its own limits… all of the domestic appliances
A: do you think those things have helped out in everyday living
M: undoubtedly. I mean my mum when she bought the washing machine she no longer had to go and smash her hands and wash things at the well! I mean…!
A: with cold water in the morning…
M: <u>eeeeh</u>! Eh eh
A: yeah yeah yeah
M: let's be objective!

We see here Manuela's talk moved by those objects that signed the shift to mass affluence, all those technologies through which the working class started to fit within a society of consumption. This increasingly blurred the rigid division between rich and poor, opening access to common practices, escalating the consumption of goods as carriers of *wellbeing*[169]. The power of these assemblages is such, for Manuela, that recognising the benefits of cheap technology cannot but be a matter of *being objective*.

Moving to the modern flat in San Vendemiano happens as part of this transition. The flat includes those energy-intensive technological goods that are supposed to make life easier (see Vannini and Taggart 2014): gas boiler, washing machine, hob, electric oven, air-conditioning. It is also *convenient, all at your doorstep*: shops, bars. But despite the libidinal charge of this flat-assemblage, which lies on the molar side of the organisation of capitalist everyday life… Manuela prefers to be here, in the old rural house. She likes to sit at the table in the dining room and just look out of the window: *this is wellbeing, eh…! Opening the blinds* and having *the picture of the Visentin*[170]*…!*

You eat and you have this view! There's no point in looking for anything else.

Not shops, not convenience... only the simple but extremely charged enjoyment of the mountain view. *I mean those who live in a block – I feel sorry for them, yes.*

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[169] This has been called "*embourgeoisment*" in sociological literature (see, e.g., Rinehart 1971: 149), a definition which I tend to share but with the caveat of not conceiving this trajectory in a reductionist way as a linear and straightforward assimilation of the working class to middle classes, which I believe the following discussion will substantiate.

[170] The mountain in front of their house.

Coming to live here involves many energy transitions for her. A very clear example is going (back – for this is how they used to heat their houses during their infancy) to the use of wood stoves. Manuela and Valerio heat their house almost completely[171] thanks to one cooking stove in the kitchen and one wood stove in the living room. Valerio still works part time in the estate on the hills near Conegliano and has arranged with the owner to chop the wood for himself there; he brings it home on a small trailer attached to his small car. This allows to save money, because they pay 200 euros for the wood and 500 for the gas…

M: Whereas when we were in San Vendemiano, five years ago, you'd spend two thousand but nowadays it would be even more!
A: eeeeh yeah
M: and the house was not even that warm!
A: ah! Yeah…
M: I mean, you could have eighteen degrees – nineteen in the whole house. But here… if I am cold like the other night that I was… that I had a back ache, that I had… twenty-one degrees – you'd be… [expression of bliss]

This extract shows, though, that stove heating is not only a matter of saving: it is also (and maybe foremost) about an embodied feeling. Manu repeatedly tells me that *if you're cold, the stove warms you up!* – a peculiar pleasure, or bliss, of having your body warmed up 'properly', which gas heating does not afford. Her body, sorrowful because of its aches, is vitalised and re-energised by this good encounter: becoming-*dog*, a *twenty-year-old* girl.

The material-affective link between fire and vital energy is further substantiated by Manuela during the interview. After telling me that "energy" means for her *the energy of the person*, she also mentions that, although she did not take any photo of "energy" for me, she had thought about fire: *it came to my mind yesterday evening that I made a grill*

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[171] They have radiators installed and a gas boiler. They only use them, sparingly, for the bedrooms (where they have no stove) in order to take away that feeling of cold humidity that you might get during the winter – what in our dialect we call "*crudo*" (literally translated: *raw*). They also function as a 'safety net' to secure their warmth in the face of an insecure future: in case they will not be able to physically deal with the effort that wood stoves demand, they can always switch on the central heating (Roberts and Henwood 2018). It is also worth noticing that this energy demand is in turn generated by socially-emerging dynamics (e.g. old people being increasingly alone in carrying out everyday life tasks).

I could have took… put… took a photo of him! [Valerio, making the grill]. The grill is first of all fire. Similarly, coming back home at the end of the interview, she prompted me to take a photo of the fire in the wood cooker as an image of "energy".

As we start to guess, strictly related to the qualities of the fire's warmth are its culinary potencies. Cooking with fire affords heightened sensual pleasures and stronger food intensities[172] – so that the two human bodies, meat, fish, vegetables, the dog, friends, myself… all gravitate around the stove and the grill, drawn in by smells, tasty food and warmth that are not afforded by gas. Even when she used to cook on the hob in San Vendemiano, when she came here she would notice that *even just a simple stew*'s taste was better. Although only Manuela cooks, Valerio, drawn by stove-intensities, also likes to tell me about its affordances. He says *the stove is better, if you know how to use it*, for a number of reasons: first of all, gas always heats, even if little – whereas with the stove *you can put a pot here, or there, depending on your needs* (it is hotter above the fire, less at the sides); furthermore*, if you go out, after ten minutes the fire dies out, while the gas keeps going and burns things*.

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[172] To the point that, even during the summer, when she wants to cook things like rabbit, or lamb, or the stock… slow-cooking things, in brief, to avoid over-heating the kitchen she uses the stove that is in the house's yellow annex. This she 'saved' from landfill when she knew that a friend wanted to throw it away.

There is also an energy saving character to the versatility and multi-tasking of the cooking stove, which is well testified by its Italian name. As Valerio says, *do you know what's this called?! This is called 'stufa economica'*[173]*! Because with this you cook, heat and roast… altogether!* He shows me how he de-freezes bread in the oven alongside: he has saved because the stove was already working, and in five minutes the bread was warm. I had the chance to see this at work many times during the day: the stove heats the house; in the meantime you can cook bread in the oven beside it; a pot of stock cooks above; and then you can make a risotto on the fire using that stock… *During the winter, the stove does everything*. Finally, at least for Manu and Valerio, the provisioning of wood is little demanding in terms of energy and money, for it is made manually and at most with the help of some small machinery[174].

The cooking stove thus holds material potencies and a number of know-hows that, from a past of rural poverty, can be reactualised in a present of energy transitions and scarcity together with the spontaneous spirit of efficiency that characterised these assemblages. Further, for Valerio, the stove's life-affirmative character coincides with a feeling of safety: *I don't need to switch on the gas… and risk getting blown up!* It does not threaten your life like the gas-assemblages of the city. Finally, it is worth noticing that stove-intensities have a rebellious character to them, since past sensations (smell, taste, thermoception…) are reactualised and tickle these bodies in a way that 'civilised', affluent, energy systems are not able to[175].

All this, certainly, requires time, work and being at home; a good deal of practical knowledge, coordination and collaboration: what are the right pieces of wood for what, the timing, the capacity to cut the wood properly…

> *Have you loaded the stove? No, I thought you'd done it! – Remember to prepare the wood for the grill tonight!* And then, when the fire struggles lighting up, joking complaints about the wood, that was not the right one.

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[173] Literally: "low-cost stove".

[174] As my grandmother sometimes says: *when you use the stove you get warm twice: first when you cut the wood, and then when you light it!* – something which we also joke about with Manuela and Valerio.

[175] To be sure, this applies to these bodies with their embodied history and sensory habitus. I am not suggesting there is something universally more pleasurable in food cooked on the stove vs. the hobs or, for that matter, in the warmth from fire vs. central heating.

Compared to before, their whole daily *routine has changed completely*: in San Vendemiano, it was easy because Manuela could just clean the whole apartment in one round of vacuum cleaner. Now, the stoves and the house more generally demand more attention, more care. In Valerio's words, *it is not like an apartment where you've got nothing to do! During the winter, you've got to chop the wood; clean up one stove, put more wood in the other! Load the wood, bring in, bring out! Cut! It takes me two hours every day!* Manuela needs to clean more often because there is more dust, she needs to exit the house to attend to the washing machine because it is in the annex. But because Manu is impeded in everyday activities by her health conditions, Valerio takes them on himself. They thus also challenge molar gender dichotomies that would assign these domestic tasks to the woman: Valerio is proud that *Manu wakes up and she finds that half of the housework has already been done!*

Hence, that there apparently is more work and less comfort in this life (Vannini and Taggart 2014) is never lived as a problem. First, the couple's life arrangements have changed now that they are retired. Before, their *personal energy* was absorbed by labour. Now, they *have time: you change your habits completely. If you work, it's different: you don't use the stove; you switch on the central heating and that's it!* Secondly, housework is not seen as a toil but as a good way of keeping active. As Valerio tells me, *in an apartment, once you wake up, make coffee… that's it, you're done. And then, you go to the osteria!* And he does not like bars – if it were for him, *they would all go bankrupt*, as Manu says. Hence, what would normally be seen as a "convenient" life in the city is challenged on its very grounds of desirability: the energy- and money-intensive comforts that it provides are actually life-diminishing, for they entail sterile (and, we should notice, entropic) consumption. On the contrary, Manuela and Valerio find (back) pleasure in life in a space of dynamic (negentropic, reproductive) interchange with human and non-human nature.

Work itself, differently from the individualised toil of paid labour, becomes a convivial practice that also produces good encounters: during my day of observation we had Manuela's cousins with us for lunch after they had finished to cut wood in a stretch of wood nearby. Valerio had helped them with the work and Manuela was particularly happy to offer them lunch, because she knows that one of them has become unemployed and has financial difficulties. The cousins, on their part, had brought with them a bottle of homemade plum liquor that they had found in an old cupboard – and which we all drank with great pleasure at the end of our meal[176].

In appreciating a free time that is (re)productive, on the fringes of market consumption, these life assemblages allow a more ecological way of being. But this is driven by love for this place, a 'vocation', rather than by explicit concerns over sustainability. Being here is foremost a matter of inhabiting different and more joyful relationships with nature, their own bodies, other people. Valerio, for instance, enjoys being able to speak freely *that even if I have this loud voice, there is no one hearing me here! Only Manu, but she's happy with that!* This is impossible in the disciplined urban environment: freedom of expression, letting desire and the body speak – even out loud[177]. Being here has also changed Manuela and Valerio's relationship itself, as if going away from the busy, divisive, fast and chaotic assemblages of the city had enlivened the affective intensities that travel through their bodies. They are now much closer than they used to be, because they share small practices, help each other, spend more time together. I can see this in their continuous calling for each other, apparently asking banal things – the wood, the dog (*where is Tobi?*), the food, the cleaning, the animals they have outside… Almost paradoxically, this closeness made them readier to accept each other's flaws: *before they were less tolerant and more nervous because they had more problems – the job, the son, the works they were carrying out here.* Manuela found *a bit oppressive* the fact that *she is the centre of his life*. Now, they have found a *balance* and she

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[176] I was amused at Valerio's remark at the end of the meal. Manuela was going to do the washing up, which she does manually because there is no dishwasher in the house. He commented jokingly and affectionately that *here it is, my dishwasher: it runs on plum liquor!*

[177] It might be worth noticing that, for Valerio, the city in general seems to have the same qualities of gas-assemblages: an energy intensive and expensive modality of coldness that stiffs limbs and disempowers bodies; wasteful appliances that burn out food or at best diminish its taste, its intensity. Very interestingly, this dichotomy between rural and urban assemblages also works in terms of interpersonal relationships, both within and outside the couple. Manuela in fact likes to reiterate that, while in the city people tend to avoid even saying hello, the apparently secluded house in Borgo Maiola helps making new friendships and connections with the people who come by. In the countryside, shared rules of social life (it is *good manners to always say hello when you meet somebody*) concur with the physical and affective qualities of rural places – their beauty, difference from 'normal' and sanctioned ways of living – to make people more outgoing and inquisitive. It is as if the countryside was a space of affective acceleration, where intensities travel fast through the slow gestures of rural living and walking. These affects make bodies encounter more easily, form larger groups and alliances, again increase their joy and vitality through conviviality and sharing (see Seremetakis 1993).

appreciates Valerio's attentions, she *cannot imagine her future without him* and tells me, moved:

M: it might be that it is because we went through so many things together, but that your husband tells you after 41 years that you know him – it's 38 years this year since we married – the very word "I love you"... I think it's the most beautiful thing in the world! [...] Or when I pass close to the couch and pretend not to care and he reaches with his arm because he wants me to go there and give him a little kiss... I mean, it's not that common!

Their going away from the city hence was not only a becoming-dog, but also a becoming-young, a way of repeating the vitality of youth, albeit differently: a vitality of slower affects, small gestures, *little kisses*[178].

Rural assemblages also make Manuela and Valerio more resilient to the economic crisis and Manuela's unemployment[179], which resulted from it. If before they had *two salaries*, they then needed to make-do with one:

M: yeah, we scaled down but maybe that came naturally because we no longer felt like going out for dinner... 'cause having the fire, having people around often... you see? It's been such a natural thing
A: natural
M: that it did not bother me.
A: yeah. Yeah yeah yeah
M: I mean, I would have done that even if I were still at work!
A: mh mh
M: 'cause... <u>here</u>! Why should I go out to have a steak that's not even properly cooked and pay twenty euros each, eating badly on top of it?!
A: eh! No no sure. Yeah here you probably have a sort of place of... of peace

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[178] Manuela often talks about the time they met and started dating – that they would end up with their *jaw sore because of too much kissing!*

[179] I truly realised this during our interview: until before, I thought they had not experienced great disruptions as a result of the recession. There is something quite striking in me not having noticed about her crisis-related unemployment during our day together. I attribute the occurrence to the fact that, as we are going to see, moving to Borgo Maiola has made unemployment a relatively undisruptive event.

M: yes! It's true!

A: where you do not need anything else

M: we did that in the past because in the past we used to go out sometimes, on Sundays – you know. Or on Saturday evening, when I was free, we'd always be out and about for dinner. We've been all over the place! But [incomprehensible]... now instead we've found this balance and it works fine as it is! [there is a nice shot here with Tobi running towards us and in the end he jumps on me] Toobiiiii! – here he comes, galloping – Toobiiiii! – you crazy!

A: Tobiiii!

M: look at him! Tobi! Come come come! Tobiiiiiiii! Come come come come come! Tobiiii! Look! You silly! Tobi! Let's go! Come come come come! Run! Ears, ears! You see only ears!

A: come on Tobi!

M: crazy! [Tobi comes from the distance] Here we are! You see? This is our happiness!

Notice the comment in brackets where I register an incomprehensible speech: it is a materialisation of Manuela's struggle with her body, the physical effort in walking. But then, towards the end, Tobi the dog appears and the difficulty is forgotten while she enters this zone of proximity in which her physical limits are deterritorialised by the dog running and playing – *this* is her happiness: participating to his doggy vitality by being here. In this sense, her becoming-dog also deterritorialises the assemblages of 'affluence' that are epitomised by their past habit to go out to restaurants. She does not question the practice *per se*, but she is rather brought away: unemployment, a house in the wood, time to cook, the sunsets, the fires, friends… *peace*. Scaling down happens without being experienced as a loss.

Certainly, the *naturalness* of this transition does not come without ecological contradictions. Assemblages of industrial affluence such as the car, fridges and freezers, supermarkets and their industrial products, meat-eating, etc. continue to involve Manuela and Valerio's bodies within ecologically damaging assemblages that they do not problematise, invested as they are by desiring flows of commodities, TV programs, infrastructures, etc. Manuela subscribes to the idea that a good life is one where you follow your desire and you make yourself *lack nothing* – which sounds problematic in terms of ecologic and economic sustainability. Yet, the pleasures afforded by the house in Borgo Maiola cut these desiring lines: their intensity is such that the couple is lead to cherish what is here. True, if Manu wants to go and *have a coffee*, she needs the car. But precisely for this reason *she stays more at home now – the other night, for example, a friend asked her to go out in the evening and she replied "no thanks, I'm happy here!"* People can also come here to spend time together: *on Sunday, when her cousin's wife is coming to make crostoli*[180]*, they are going to stay here. "Why should I go around… that I don't care a damn!".* Also, the fact that Valerio enjoys spending time in the vegetable garden and caring for the few animals they have means being less dependent on supermarkets and industrial food.

We start seeing that Manuela's commitment to *making ourselves lack nothing* is different from a consumerist drive to infinite appropriation. This becomes particularly evident during the interview. While she thinks that the benefits of modern technologies are *objective*, she also looks critically at *young people* and their consumption practices, that she sees as excessive:

> *they're used to having: the computer, the mobile – and maybe that's not even enough, they need two; 'cause they want the big car, 'cause you must go around with brand clothes, 'cause you must go out for the aperitif, 'cause you must…!*

She laments that these are becoming necessities for young people, *something they're no longer able to do without!* It is as if commodities were so powerful over bodies that they overwhelm and enslave them. But interestingly, consumption practices are not constructed as inherently 'good' or 'bad'[181]. Manuela's point is pragmatic: the drive to endlessly consume makes young people *suffer the crisis much more*. Their ability to cope with material downscaling is weakened, they are not resilient[182]. Driven by the "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) of growth, the youth has been consuming – consuming money, consuming resources, consuming desire.

Hence, we might say that the threshold between 'good' and 'bad' consumption lies for Manuela in the capacity to stop consuming because she values a certain desiring autonomy cultivated through limit: the capacity to appreciate small gestures of consumption almost as special, affectively rich, treats. *Having never lacked anything*

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[180] Typical sweets that are made in Veneto during the Carnival period.

[181] For instance, she says that *if I am out and it is time for the aperitif, I take the aperitif!* Underscoring that there is nothing 'wrong' in doing so, per se.

[182] This problem she attributes to a *mistake* of her generation that – precisely taken by the machine of progress-as-affluence – was *afraid* that their children would suffer from the material limitations they had experienced: *these young people they've been given everything – really everything, eh! Everything! 'cause you were afraid of God knows what. Instead, it's been a mistake!*

refers not to accumulation but to the making-intense of simple things, which wards off the chase for further superfluous objects[183]. Ease in facing the crisis is thus also related to being inserted in a machine of frugality, sobriety and resilience[184] which had the function to secure a livelihood that was not granted anyhow: a wise management of finite resources, which in turn afforded *financial security* – their *little stockpile* (as she says while showing me her full freezers) (see Groves et al. 2016). As such, going to live in Borgo Maiola during a period of crisis is in part a 'coming back home'[185], a weakening of the desiring intensity of consumer capitalism and a strengthening of frugality as more affectively rich but energy thrifty mode of desire – a peculiar hedonistic parsimony.

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[183] This materialises in a deep respect for objects. It is *natural* to reuse things if they are still *nice* and functional, and she is aware that *this also means energy saving*. It is a recurring topic, charged with libidinal intensity. Manuela *tells me with pride that in the house everything is recycled. People throw things away and they say: "bring it over!".* Furniture, stoves, freezer... Valerio restores old things or makes do. They reuse 'disposable' objects like bread paper bags and plastic yoghurt containers. As Manuela admits that *we've always done things in this way, it is in our DNA!*, we see that a "texturing" of waste in a poor infancy when throwing away usable things was not so much 'wrong' as somehow impossible, comes back as a matter of pride and resistance to the ecologically, socially and existentially damaging overconsumption of the present.

[184] Roberts (forthcoming) has aptly called this "frugal resilience".

[185] Manuela's grandmother lived and died in this very hamlet.

We stop to look at the landscape: "I come here and I think: here you live well! […] here, at night, with the sunset… it's wonderful!"

And as Manu tells this to me, I hope we can learn from this small story how to make the most of our sunset and be born again, like snowdrops, different.

6.2.4. Animal cycles

H: […] and then after this level[186] *you get to yet another level of life that is also animal, because an animal life I intend it as… a life in a natural environment*

A: mh

H: if you live the environment in a natural way, even a technological environment can become natural, from my point of view

A: yes, yes

H: so developing an animality on that level – what I was telling you, about the fixed bikes and the guys who run on[187]*…*

A: yeah yeah yeah

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[186] We were talking about the ‘civilised’ normality of moving by car.

[187] *While Homica tidies up after lunch, we talk about bicycles. For him, it’s been “illuminating” that, after the complications of the past decades, fixed bikes have lately become fashionable: a bare bike, aesthetically beautiful, which gives you a great sense of freedom. They were born in cities, from people who needed to move fast, and then they’ve also become of interest for races and experimentations. They changed his perception of traffic: no longer as an enemy of the bicycle but something like a “natural force”, like a river – something fluid without beginning or end through which to find your way and capable of giving strong emotions. And then what he likes is that they “send to hell” the tendency now, of making everything complicated, “they enjoy themselves like mad, and most importantly it is <u>the fastest way</u> to go from A to B in a city! And people would think going around by bike is absurd…!”*

H: for me that is an example of... positive animality – 'cause it is positive. I have never had a similar experience but I have experienced, in Vittorio, running on my bike, flat out, surpassing[188] cars…

A: the cars…

H: avoiding, and so on and so forth… Wonderful! I mean really... a thrill, yeah, and without doing God knows what God knows where, yeah! But this depends upon the presence of the cars! Eheheheh [we laugh]

A: no way out! You cannot…!

H: so you see, talking freely: contradictions on top of contradictions really! But, in the end, I mean, you do what you do and I like maybe… yeah, having the opportunity like with you to vent all this that I… [he laughs] yeah, I mean, I don't…!

A: but actually it's…

H: I don't do it often…!

A: ah! often!

H: and recently all the less, just think! [we laugh]

Homica[189] is a middle-aged man. He now lives with his wife and son in an old house in the rural village of Lago[190]. The extract above introduces us to his passion for bodily movement, bikes, the experience of energy and the excitation these experiences afford. But in order to better understand the significance that all this has in terms of his life-course, we need to go back in time. Homica started running (or, better, cycling), very fast, in 1985, when he was 18. Away from a family, a life ideal, a future. His family had had an established milling business for generations in Follina[191]. *My grandfather closed down the mill because of scale economy... it'd gone out of scale – the small mill, you know, the same old concentration [of capital] upwards, and so on and so forth.* Decline

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[188] He uses the dialect for this expression, as he often does when he is taken over by some intensity… as if letting his civilised human being drop out, letting an animal or a primitive in.

[189] The pseudonym was chosen by the participant. It has a long history, as it was the name he gave to a project of bicycle construction that he started many years ago but somehow never realised.

[190] This is a small stone-house village on the lake, where I have myself lived as a child and my father still lives. My father introduced me to Homica in the occasion of my research.

[191] Follina is a village (important for a beautiful Medieval abbey) some 20 kilometres from Vittorio Veneto, at the far end of the Valsana – where also Lago is. This is a valley where two connected lakes sit. It has historically been very much related to Vittorio Veneto, which is the closest urban centre.

of agricultural self-sustenance in the area, the advent of low-price food, diet starting to include more meat and less cereals[192], the coming of multinationals (exploitation of people, land, animals… for cost cut), monopolies, decline of independent businesses. The son of the miller, Homica's father, starts back again, differently: *a small farm with laying-hens – 'cause that was, let's say, the right moment for that*. Popularity of animal products, entrepreneurial spirit, stubbornness, the ethics of hard work and money saving/accumulation. The business started and was growing well until eggs and other products from Holland started to be imported and invaded the local market thanks to their competitive prices. It was 1984-'85. The same old story – again: a global development that goes fast, the local not keeping pace. *Just think, my father: just take a small family that saves, that works, and so on and so forth… collapse.* And the collapse is as much socio-economic as it is personal and familiar. For then the father, Homica tells me self-effacing, *died – and he died in a bad way, on top of it, 'cause he practically took his own life – in practice… another story*[193].

H: so there was all of this crazy stuff
A: oh God yes
H: I don't wanna start doing this kind of…
A: mh
H: I mean, for me it's been something… for God's mercy!
A: yeah
H: so in a certain sense I have developed myself on… on… well obviously on other things. But this, with a huge sense of freedom as well, if you want, I mean…!
A: yeeeah!
H: 'cause I mean it's like that, right?, like…!
A: precisely! Once you've lost everything…!
H: indeed, right?
A: that void we'd talked about![194]

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[192] The most popular crop in the valley is corn, which used to be mostly milled to make polenta – a 'poor' but nutritious food, cooked on the cooking stove. People would often eat it mixed with milk or beans, as I know from my grandmother.

[193] Although this story refers to some thirty years ago, we have been hearing similar things since 2008: entrepreneurs taking their own life after bankruptcy took away their (hard-worked) savings. History (at least capitalism's) repeats.

[194] Homica repeatedly tells me that he enjoys the experience of mental and psychological *voids* as 'places' in which to experiment new things and life-forms.

H: exactly! And this… true, I was 18, so age was on my side, if you want, right?, turning the whole thing on its head, in a certain sense… but from here arose… I mean, these experiences they had me think that getting to nothing is indeed just the good occasion to create something, to experiment, to have a neatness of... of... a neat environment in which to build, bui--- experiment – without anybody telling you that things are like this, or now they are like that, look you cannot, look that... aaaaaaand… all these rules and things

A: you've always been a free spirit!

H: indeed. It might be that independently from what happened, in any case I'd--- I'd be… "a little bit of a weirdo"[195]*, let's say…! [I laugh]*

A: do you think it would be one of your features anyway?

H: probably yes… yeees I think so: I had some seeds of… always had, let's say. But obviously reinforced! [I laugh]

As *markets wreck* a whole territorialised way of living collapses. This is what a crisis can do: starting to make one <u>feel</u> the fragility, the nothingness, but also the extreme dangers of the imperative of affluence, growth and accumulation. Homica already was *a little bit of a weirdo*, as he described himself – eccentric with respect to accepted and acceptable modes of intending and practicing life. And yet, he 'needed' the financial and familial crisis of his youth for a strong deterritorialisation, a line of flight, to emerge – a strange irreducible becoming: starting to cycle, accelerating, producing *voids*… He was thus put into a critical space with regards to the molar assemblages of his own society. In particular, he started to question the image of <u>*the adjusted 'famiglietta'*</u>[196] – what has been collectively constructed, *in Veneto*, as 'civilisation' in the era of industrialisation. Homica perceives this as a *'where I should be' – a construct that is created for me, by others for me, by others for themselves*; what society expects him to be and is embodied by his childhood family:

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[195] In dialect.

[196] The literal translation for *famiglietta* is "little family", but <u>*la*</u> *famiglietta* can almost be regarded as a concept in its own right which tends to refer to a specific social phenomenon: the typical family of the area – nuclear, hard-working, parsimonious and yet provided of all the objects and qualities that make it socially respectable. A pet family, we might say.

The family that grows, with the kids, and this and that… within this 'where I should be' there is, clearly, little by little: the house, the car, the kitchen, throw away the cupboard[197]*, furnish the living room…! [I laugh] I mean, there's this all!*

A family embodying economic 'growth' as: development, modernisation, disowning of poor origins.

He flees from this kind of life-ideal after 'his' crisis. In this, he is helped by the encounter with critical ecology literature. The latter, during the difficult moments of his adolescence, provides new territories for his life to develop beyond the void that had ensued. Georgescu-Roegen; Rifkin; Pallante; Illich; Latouche; Bookchin; *a number of authors in between.* These readings completely change his relationship to energy and nature, introducing him to the debates on ecology that were coming to the fore. These writings challenge the energy intensive assemblages that were constructed for him and allow to elaborate and materialise his line of flight into a different, but still purposive, way of life. The latter's *ideal* converges around a different ecological regime, compared to that of the *famiglietta*: less entropic and destructive, low-energy, promoting simple hedonism, the preservation of traditional and low-impact know-how, creative reuse and recycle, etc.

Bikes are among the objects that best epitomise this transition and not by chance they physically pervade his everyday life, his talk, his spaces[198]: ecological, democratic, fast but slow, efficient, but especially put in motion by the most (directly) available kind of renewable energy – bodily energy (see Illich 1973). Furthermore, the bike responds to a *necessity to move* that Homica has always experienced since he was young, to spend his plentiful bodily energy. His readings suggested that this energy, instead of being let out in entertainment and sports (as with Onurbio, see §6.1.1.), could be better put to use for doing things: moving around, commuting, building, making etc. He likes running, for instance, but now for him *the best thing is running towards something, not going around aimlessly*. He thus tries to turn his own (bodily) energy expenditures into endeavours that

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[197] In dialect: "*la cardenza*". The language switch is significant. *La cardenza* does not refer simply to a piece of furniture, but to the cupboard as condensation of the rural culture that was, and is, being *thrown away* as part of the economic growth of the North East – the transition from a frugal livelihood to the consumerist and industry-led culture of the ever-new (see Agamben 2018). Throwing away the cupboard is a sign of emancipation from the poor roots of rurality towards the affluence of industrial development.

[198] Homica has accumulated myriad used bikes that he leaves there, as if they were a reservoir of potentiality – *I know I'm gonna need some of them in the future: the point is that I don't know right now which ones they'll be, so I keep them all!*

are productive, but in a very different sense than those enacted in regimes of capitalist entropic labour and commodification[199]. Indeed, Homica's activities are better understood as negentropic activities of reproduction: turning old wine barrels to tables, chairs and floors; restoring his old house in Lago using recycled and old furniture (among which old grandmother's *cupboards*!), cycling some 10 miles to get to a mountain where there is a specific sand traditionally used in the area for making plaster; a vegetable garden; building a boat for going with the son to the lake; etc.

In carrying out these activities, in cultivating low-energy mobility patterns, Homica poses limitations on energy and commodities consumption out of ecological concerns. Yet, it would be somehow misleading to see such limitations as 'repressive' of desire, driven by an abstract commitment to respect (let alone 'preserve' or 'save') 'nature'. What seems far more determinant is, in fact, an almost opposite commitment to cultivate intense experiences of energy. Homica laments that *civilisation* (especially ours) entails human beings positing a number of *wrappings* between their own bodies and the rest of the world: *the clothes, the house, the car*, etc. *Wrappings*, by acting as a mediation with the rest of the world, de-intensify experience and the occasions of knowledge it gives. For instance, the car takes me away the experience of how much it takes to move a body from one place to the other but also of how much my body could bring me where the car does: I lose sense of what my body can do; I no longer experience certain bodily affects, like *fatigue – which might also be sound under many points of view, within certain limits.* Cultivating 'different' relationships to daily energies means un-wrapping. Becoming-animal as opposed to civilised, reaching a level of intense *animality*. This has nothing to do with living like an animal: it is an effort to live life in a less materially mediated way that responds to a desire of letting a body be affected by things – good and bad, risky and comfortable, hot and cold. It is desire itself that calls for these material-energetic limits as intensifiers of experience.

This coincides with a more sustainable way of living: the ubiquity and ever-increasing number of *wrappings* that our civilisation produces and territorialises as 'needs' involves a necessarily unsustainable[200] use of energy and resources. Further,

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[199] Admittedly, the idea of putting at work one's energy, economizing it, might vaguely resonate with productivist ideals of efficacy and efficiency. And in some cases, Homica's peculiar way to use energy did have a business sense, like when he went on a representation trip to Germany for a local winery by bike. Yet, other bike travels to Turkey or Cape North (with no money and no shoes) had no specific objective other than creative discovery, knowledge, contact with different realities, personal growth.

[200] As we shall see, Homica does not believe that 'greenwashing' of production could ever be enough.

because of the affective 'dilution' that they entail, they put in motion an ecologically-destructive chase for always-novel gadgets and excitement: *this is the point: this society, which is super excited, super exciting things – I mean – but at such a high price!* Becoming-animal thus means living life *on the skin*, opening up to the contingency of the world as it unfolds, finding (back) a *thrill* in life without the need of such dissipative consumption.

For instance, Homica does not heat his bedroom, which sometimes reaches 11° C, but only to produce a *shiver*: *that you feel the 'sbrisoin'*[201] *each time you go in the bed!* Or the other day (it was March), he was taking home his son from school, walking, and they found the track by the lake was flooded. *So they walked on it for a while – he, with his entire leg in and the son, at a certain point, even up to the belly. The water was extremely clear but also extremely cold: "I thought I wouldn't make it at a certain point!". But his son was so excited he wanted to go back the day after.* Similarly with his extreme bike trips:

> *"After many years, there are many things I don't remember, but these are things that remain with you". Like when, coming back from Cape North, after days of very little eating and many kilometres cycling, he got home without previous notice just at dinner time – a night when his wife had a few friends around and had cooked pumpkin gnocchi: he still remembers them.*

The intensity of a memory, of a food that was made more intense by *fatigue*. It is a play of thresholds: experiencing extreme energy conditions, the risk to fall, and the effort to find a balance again – *balance and imbalance*. There is discomfort, life is not always happy and easy. But this is exactly its strength – experiencing the richness of affects that makes life a passionate business. Un-wrap because the ubiquitous comfort that wrappings provide *burns your life out!*[202] Sustainability is thus for Homica driven by a will-to-potency: to not let comfort burn life out, but not burning the earth in the meantime – embodied connection between the deadening of micro-human experience and of global ecosystems. The cultivation of liveliness is always trans-human because experienced relationally: thriving and thrilling intensely as human being cannot but happen <u>with</u> and

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[201] Dialect. A colloquial, almost sweet, way of indicating the shiver of cold things in contact with the skin.

[202] In dialect.

not despite things, other people, animals... Sustainability is not about Self-preservation: it is driven by the force of Life resisting destruction[203].

We thus start to see that Homica's a-moral ecological attitude does not rule out its being profoundly ethical. It is founded on a "belief in the world" that is all but cynical or nihilistic despite not having any arrogant presumption of knowing the truth about it. Homica is never sure whether anything is right or wrong. He even questions that human beings have the capacity to control and change their anti-ecological practices – maybe they are just made like and for this, a sort of drive towards complete appropriation of resources… until self-destruction. Nonetheless, he throws himself with all his intense animal affectivity in constant experimentation of better, or different, energy assemblages:

> *I looked for new spaces, let's say, that also had a view on… let's say, an actuality in the future, that they were also… yeah fleshy […] that had something to do with life, let's say; and then I pick--- I used to re-elaborate them and so on. Whenever I found myself in these nests, it was perfect for me!*

Precisely because they were *fleshy* and were to have an *actuality in the future* (see also Hagbert and Bradley 2017), his *new spaces* could not be (at least in intention) detrimental to the ecosystems in which they were embedded.

Homica perceives his ecological practices and views as countertrend compared to the ways in which 'sustainability' (a word he does not like much) is being mainstreamed nowadays. Since the "green economy" has been subjected to the logic of capital, ecology is no longer a radical, *virgin*, free space in which to experiment. In the process, 'sustainability' has been mobilised as a means to promote and produce further *comfortable*, life-diminishing, *wrappings*: electrical bicycles, class A^{+++} appliances, eco-clothing, norms about what counts as 'sustainable behaviours'. It has become a *super-limp* idea, that no longer steers any vital energy, affects and intensities. Hence, despite continuing to live according to radical ideals of sustainability, he has lately put at rest many of his enthusiasms in communicating his ecological ideas (e.g. about the wastefulness and irrationalities of our civilisation, the lures and side-effects of

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[203] His distance from the (neo)liberal pursuit will to power and self-enhancement is, by the way, testified by his remark that *unfortunately* [for in this society it is a disadvantage] *I don't--- I don't like to compete, it's my deficiency, I have never liked it.* For this reason, he has sought to create spaces of difference, assemblages of desire where the singular lines that traverse his everyday life can find a suitable materialisation.

mechanisation, the organisation of full-time wage labour as trigger for enhanced needs of unsustainable consumption, etc.) to others, he seldom reads radical ecology literature, he suffered failures for some of his projects[204]. Indeed, there is a certain frustration in his being 'untimely', which makes all this quite a sensitive and painful topic[205].

And yet… *in the end, I mean, you do what you do and I like maybe… yeah, having the opportunity like with you to vent all this*. Desire is never really put to rest, awaits for the right moments to produce something new. Research encounters might be one of these. I could sense my sheer presence, our conversations, the small things we did together mobilise both the joyous and difficult affects that energy had, in the past, mobilised. I saw Homica on *the ground in front of the sofa, kneeling, almost prone, taking notes on what books to go and retrieve from the boxes upstairs – books he "used to read"*: reconnection with things left dormant in the attic. More than one year later we met by chance. Homica promised me the images of energy he had never given to me. In sending them, he told me that my requests had *opened* him *the "visual communication" [sic] vein*[206] and he had *produced a poster* to bring to a demonstration organised by the free-vax movement he was part of.

After all, our encounter was (politically) productive. But this depended upon our encounter generating zones of proximity that deterritorialised both. In some ways, we were brought to a past: me, to my rural and a little savage, uncivilised, life in Lago; him, to when he was still a stargazer. But we were also both becoming something else again –

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[204] He is perceived as radical and "alternative" by most people, although he is keen to say that – compared to the rest of the world – he is closer to the world average than a 'normal' person in the area. In passing, we might notice that Homica's initial remark about the increasing difficulty he experiences in talking about radical energy views with others suggests something quite different to what Shirani et al. (2016) (see above, §2.4.2) found about the increasing 'normalisation' of 'green' living as being a facilitator for pro-environmental behaviour. It is as if, once ecological discourses and practices have entered the 'mainstream' there is no longer space for their radical variants: 'normal' is to opt for green lifestyle solutions within the market, while more radical approaches (like downshifting, self-production, recycling, voluntary simplicity, etc.) are increasingly seen as aberrant.

[205] When we first met for getting to know each other, Homica admitted that he was almost going to say *no* to my father, when asked if he was willing to meet me for my study. He only made up his mind after encountering me.

[206] As I am writing, Italy is going through a big public debate on vaccines that targets a government decision to make even more of them compulsory. A momentary becoming-bacteria and becoming-minor for life and against molar neo-liberal engineering of life, happens as Homica writes me, unprompted (personal communication, 12/09/2017): *beyond the superficial issue, vaccines are good / bad for health, deeper, it is a coercive violation of the confines of the physical body, a violence that has a Medieval taste to it, if at that time syringes existed. An aggression to vital essence.*

animals, fathers, sociologists, children, fishes, rocks, algae, economists, activists… And this involved us both taking some *wrappings* away:

> As we were walking along the lakes during our interview (but who was interviewing whom?), the path was flooded, again. *We might need to take away the shoes… do you mind?* I did not. *We need to go in. We take away… well, some mud won't do us bad.* It did not.

6.3. Third line of becoming: becoming vegan

I dedicate this section to three participants, who undertook a similar transition: they have become vegan and, as a result, sensitive to environmental issues. They are closely connected: Chiara, a 18-year-old girl; her brother, Mirko (24-year-old); Elisa, Mirko's girlfriend (22-year-old). The hyphen missing from the title (becoming vegan, as opposed to becoming-vegan) has been avoided purposefully. I try to emphasise a process of change that entails a transition from one specific condition to another, well defined: not a "becoming" in the sense used up to now. In the following sections I will try to emphasise both the promises and dangers of veganism in opening new relations to everyday energy and ecologies more generally.

6.3.1. For the love of animals (and girlfriends): passionate transitions

Elisa recounts how she suddenly stopped eating meat. She has always loved animals. When she was 17 she was volunteering in a cat refuge: one day, going back home, she realised how "stupid" it was to help cats and then go home and eat cows, "and so I started to get informed and I became vegetarian basically on the spot".

Becoming a vegan is often understood as being an ethical-rational choice, based first of all on a deliberate choice not to hurt kin species and, increasingly, the whole of the planet (Vinnari and Vinnari 2014). This is how my participants often construct their choice: a matter of fairness and trans-species justice. In the extract above, Elisa constructs this choice as rational in implicit opposition to the *stupid* fact of acting in contradictory ways. Yet, we can also understand the three participants' becoming vegan as emerging not so much out of rational deliberations, but rather at the crossroads of encounters, proximities and intensities in-between bodies – an affective-desiring process that goes often amiss. Notably, this dimension also features in the extract above. Despite Elisa's construction of the transition as entailing a tension towards enlightenment and coherence (rationality), her story is about a sudden epiphany: *one day*, all at once, she was struck by a realisation – she used to eat, daily, animals quite similar to those she was lovingly caring for in the cat refuge.

It is an event, irreducible to any causal explanation: a "threshold" of intensity is passed so that, in some ways, everything changes and the world is no longer what it used to be, its categories no longer hold rigidly as they did before, the binary pets for loving | cows for eating is destabilised. This event is first of all *affective*: it depends on Elisa's body being involved in proximities with cats and their animal intensities. Open to these encounters, she is involved in processes of "becoming-animal" – Elisa becoming-cat, the cat deterritorialised in turn to become something else, no longer 'animal' (in the sense of neatly distinct from 'human')… The very divide between humans and non-humans starts to crumble in favour of suppler distinctions, responsive to the affective continuity that threads through proximate living beings. This event brings Elisa's desiring assemblages to a novel, more harmonious, configuration: food habits begin to flow with other lines of desire, for instance the love for animals threading through her family. *I've always been taught that animals are our friends.*

Something similar happens for Chiara, who also talks about a life-long love for animals. Even when she was a child, she remembers: *I was mad about animals – and in* *fact my mother thought I'd become a vet!* Here, she relates her veganism not to rationality but to *madness*: passion and affective investment in/by animals, desire for a caring relationality. She appeals to an infancy that functions as the repository of a deep-seated and almost 'original' drive that has little to do with abstract-universalist appreciation of animals' rights to life. By virtue of this construction itself, it is a libidinal pull that subtends present 'choices'. Mirko's case is somewhat different, for he was rather indifferent to animals before meeting Elisa. He initially started to avoid meat as a means to please his new girlfriend[207]. But this makes his transition affective too: it was guided in the first instance by attraction for a woman.

Recasting the three transitions in terms of desire helps us appreciating the one-sidedness of many accounts of veganism as self-denying practice that implies a suffered repression of sensuous drives towards the (assumed) pleasures and habits of meat. We start to appreciate how much changing diet brings with it novel and sometimes expanded food pleasures, sensitivities and physical wellbeing[208]. Elisa, for instance, tells me that she has regained pleasure in food since she became vegan. Before, she *would only eat meat* and would rather get all the rest of her nutrition via tablets; now, she has discovered the wealth and tastiness of plants, which are also good for her health. She likes to experiment with cooking, and Mirko enjoys her vegan dishes, also admitting that he has discovered much of the potentials of plant-based food that he would not appreciate before. Like Chiara, in fact, he used to enjoy cured meat and cheeses. As such territorialised (and territorial, for these are very typical foods of the Veneto region) food tastes are deterritorialised, curiosity and inquisitiveness, but also enjoyments, open up towards novel or rediscovered tastes: tofu, cous cous, a simple salad.

As such, a plant-based diet acquires a life-affirmative, joyous, character that also articulates in everyday experiences of energy. Chiara's case is very telling in this context. Consider the following extract, which refers to the beginning of my interview with her, as I asked her whether she had any comment to make about our day together:

C: […] the other day, while we were in the gym and I asked you if... what were you observing in particular

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[207] For instance, he recounts me that he would make an effort to cook without using meat and then text Elisa telling her about this.

[208] This observation is also in line with other empirical literature that directly studies narratives and accounts of vegans (e.g. Cole 2008; Vinnari and Vinnari 2014; Twine 2017).

A: mh mh

C: well! I didn't expect you considered the whole issue of movement as well… kinetic energy[209]*… only this little thought I made with myself. But… for the rest, nothing.*

A: did the thing look to you… positive, negative… stupid?

C: mmm noooo positive, in the sense that I hadn't… I mean, I had never considered that aspect […] Yeah I thought you were only considering energy like… electricity at best, right? So…

The fact that Chiara was so impressed by my remark made visible the important role that bodily energy has in her desiring assemblages[210], her transition to veganism and then to a raw diet[211]. Since I first met her, I had the impression that Chiara's body had a *'low' energy*, as I wrote in my fieldnotes. There was something like a gap between 'she' and 'her body', a way of inhabiting her physical shape that was uncomfortable, unfitting. She always wears large sweaters and T-shirts that partially hide her body shape, particularly two big breasts. She struggles with physical activity, to the point that she asked for an exoneration from the sports class at school.

Yet, she does care about her body and bodily shape. Her house is strangely populated by gym machinery like a step, an abdominal plank, weights[212]… scattered around the living room, the bedroom and a utility room. She also likes to walk to Saint Augusta sanctuary (a nice half-hour walk through fields, woods and hills that begins very close to her house). Recently, she has subscribed to a gym, where she goes three times a week. She almost lights up when recounting me how, when she was young, she used to go swimming at the pool – she loved it: *I was like <u>a little fish</u>*. And, very significantly, *I*

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[209] I have never used the phrase "kinetic energy" to refer to the energy used by bodies in movement. This is Chiara's contribution.

[210] The extract is also, I believe, testimony of the deterritorialising and productive potency of research encounters, that can open new visions (of energy) and articulation of experience. One of the two photos Chiara selected as representative of "energy" for her is that of a hummingbird (see below): *I am fascinated by this thing, that it moves its wings many times… […] super-rapid.* She admits that the choice of this photograph might have been due to my own mentioning that I am attentive to physical energy as well.

[211] She adopted an extremely strict raw diet in the effort to solve an issue with a polycystic ovary that has blocked her cycle since three years ago. Chiara now eats only raw fruits and vegetables: in the morning, *a big fresh orange juice* and *sometimes a few dates*; for lunch, big bowls of fruits; for dinner, some raw vegetables. She has not solved her physical condition but by foregrounding the possibility that things might improve in the future her diet keeps alive her hope for a more functioning body.

[212] She tells me she used to practice sometimes with those before subscribing to the gym, to compensate for the fact she *was doing nothing.*

was lean. Whenever she recalls this memory from her childhood, she is taken in a passionate movement of becoming: becoming-fish, becoming-water. Her body is invested by the intensity of a joyful assemblage where movement happens in harmony: arms compose well with water, legs push through the liquid to get where she wants, how she wants. But also, her body becomes fit and in-shape with the social standards that it does not meet now.

Chiara's transition to veganism is inseparable from the intensity of this becoming. First, in a rather straightforward way, she sees raw veganism as a good health choice and therefore a body-potentiating diet. Her becoming vegan has always been primarily a matter of animal welfare: *I don't care much about health issues*; *I would rather eat an entire bowl of chips than the tiniest bit of chicken*. Yet, disseminated through on-line newspaper articles, Facebook posts, vignettes, common talk among vegans, etc. the healthy-ness of a vegan diet becomes another – almost integral – dimension of it. Chiara confirms: instead of being badly affected by lack of animal proteins as she expected, her physical situation has improved: less spots, less oily skin, less oily hair. Since she became vegan, also, for the first time she *managed to lose weight: without thinking much about it and without making big changes – to the contrary, meeting certain desires, like chocolate…* While *before,* when she ate *normal*, she kept trying diets but none of them worked.

That what she perceives as an unfitting – fat, oily, out of shape – body improves thanks to the changing diet invests veganism with the desiring intensity of becoming-fish, becoming-lean (again). Potency against impotency. Furthermore, her diet is consistent with her ethical concerns: animals' and people's welfare, ecosystem health – traceability of ingredients being *easier. Because if you look--- if you buy more elaborated things, you cannot know where each ingredient comes from. And I am sure that because they are always driven by money saving… I think it is more eco--- eco-logic something like mine where you are sure where things come from…* Hence, feeling better in her own body goes hand in hand with avoiding what is felt as unnecessary cruelty on other living beings and a cultivation of desiring dynamics that move (through) her: her body flourishes <u>with</u> others (human, animal, plants…) and not despite them – a vibrant proximity with things in a mutual and dynamic movement: becoming-imperceptible[213] that is also a becoming-animal, becoming-joyful, becoming-colourful.

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[213] Interestingly, she says that "energy" is for her about movement and/as change, a dynamic movement – what we might see as a deterritorialising force that stretches

Similarly, I was impressed by the affective intensities that I could experience circulating in-between and through Elisa and animals. In Venice, Mirko, Elisa and I were walking along the sunny streets and squares, going from one lecture theatre to another, surrounded by beautiful palaces and old houses. We were somewhat rushing and Mirko pushed us to quicken up our pace. But Elisa did not care. *She knows she can download the following lecture from Dropbox.* She preferred to let herself be taken over by the intensities of animals and flowers around.

As we pass by the beautiful old houses with flowers on their balconies, Elisa – as always – shows us a cat who's sitting on a window; then she stops to cuddle one who's lying, languid, on the small wall of a flower bed, full of red roses, close to a bench that she climbs to get closer. They then explain to me that they know him well because they often find him there, even if some time has passed since last time. They also know his name.

Her luminous smile, the indulgent touch on the cat's fur, this stretched moment of time in proximity… they all struck me as a moment of libidinal intensity in a becoming-animal, becoming-flower, becoming-sun.

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towards imperceptibility: *I am fascinated by […] movement in general… yeeeah! […] because it means like… a change in a situation* (see also §6.1.1).

Walking throughout the city, or cycling around, like in the cat refuge, Elisa's body is continuously taken in such movements that spark new connections with the non-human world. She dreams to live, in the future, in a house full of animals and flowers and spend her time with them. Becoming vegan meets, like for Chiara, a desire of not hurting loved creatures – friends with whom she rather spend affectionate exchanges than digestive processes. Her abstention from meat is joyful, in this sense, because it co-emerges with, and accelerates, a desire for-of trans-human love. And it is so intense that it draws along other bodies – Mirko's, for instance, who admits: *you make me see interesting things* – the bare beauty of *a garden*, of *a small bird*; the pleasantness of the dog's presence, the beauty of a sky. These novel affections make his life richer and more diverse, more respectful and vibrant – to the point that he affirms Elisa *made me a good person* by pushing him to give up meat.

6.3.2. Spilling over: reducing energy use in other domains of everyday life

We start to appreciate that a transition to vegetarianism and then veganism can be a very powerful source of deterritorialisation of established assemblages, towards more sensitive ways of inhabiting ecologies. Becoming vegan means completely changing food habits, tastes and norms about what is good to eat or not. Novel sensitivities challenge established anthropocentric assemblages. It is as if, suddenly, all the taken for granted assumptions were put on hold and this moves curiosity, pushes a search for novel investigations around the body (human and non-human), food, trans-species relations. This has the effect (which we might say largely emancipatory) of making these young people critical of all knowledge that is passed on to them as taken for granted or natural, like *traditions*. For instance, to the assumed fact that eating animals is fine *because human beings have always done so*, the three object that many things have been considered *normal for centuries, like slavery* – and yet abolished for good. To hetero-determination based on territorialised assemblages (of things, of enunciation) they counterpoise the <u>making</u> of a different world that might be more responsive to the desire for non-violence and respect for other beings.

Building this novel territory requires the construction of a stock of practices and discourses. In doing so, the easiest and most accessible instruments are, for them, the internet and social media[214]. Here, the violence of industrial and large-scale animal farming, hunt and fishing is forcefully put in view and the virtuousness of abstention from animal products reinforced; a close-knit community forms around the commitment to construct and spread novel trans-human assemblages. Arguments against animal mistreatment and subjection are there increasingly accompanied by a denunciation of their grave ecological consequences: contribution to climate change, resource depletion, excessive land use and global energy-food injustices. The adoption of new dietary habits hence starts to 'spill out' to make the three aware of the unsustainability of Western everyday habits and lifestyle more generally. And because non-anthropocentric lines of assembly were already open towards a general respect for planetary ecosystems, this knowledge pushes them to contain all ecologically damaging practices.

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[214] Some of the most relevant Facebook pages that they follow are: Sea Shepherd, Vegan Food and Living, Anonymous for the Voiceless, Lush Cosmetics North America, In The Know, Vegan Gains, The Vegan Lover, Il Comico Vegano Manuel Negro, So Vegan, The Urban Vegan, VEGANOK Network.

Energy consumption, especially from non-renewables, is carefully reduced. This transition is well encapsulated in the following extract, where I ask Elisa whether there has been a lifecourse change in the way she uses energy:

E: well it's surely changed. I mean I am careful with everything now. If I leave a room I switch off the light, I get angry with my mum if she doesn't… things like that. Also the central heating. Before, I would always stand close to radiators whereas now I understood that if I am cold I need to wear more clothes! I should not just switch on the heating whenever I am a bit cold! I mean it's a matter of being a bit… if I am cold I put long socks on instead of having the air that keeps coming in! Eheh. Aaand… what was the other question – I've forgotten?
A: no yeah yeah if something had changed… and this change where did it come from? I mean, for example: you now tell me "ah, everything has changed…"
E: because I gained consciousness of all the issues! I mean before I was… how old was I…? I did not use to think much about these things. I didn't even have doubts, I didn't ask questions. Then, becoming vegan, I found out many things and so… I mean, a consciousness regarding these themes has grown…
A: so it was the fact of becoming vegan that brought about this… this change?
E: precisely. Yes, definitely.

From this extract we see that changing diet means changing "consciousness", but also relations with other people (the mum, who is pushed to save energy), with one's own body and sense-perceptions around being cold, warm, comfortable or at ease within the house. For Elisa, but also Mirko and Chiara, passing the threshold of veganism means destabilising the mindless repetition of everyday taken for granted ways of thinking, doing and sensing. Instead, they are situated in novel affective assemblages of energy, built through and around discourses (being parsimonious, not wasting) and material arrangements (long socks, one more sweater, colder rooms) of inter-relationality and care.

More generally, a logic of limit and parsimony structures many of their everyday (consumption) practices. In terms of commuting, for instance, the three are very happy (and proud) to use the bicycle, the train or walking on foot instead of more energy-intensive means of transport like the car. They are also very attentive to the ways they use energy within the house and avoid wasting it: switch off lights and electronic devices that are not in use, avoid very energy-intensive appliances like the electric heater for the bathroom, take shorter showers. Further, they have cut down on clothes and appliances purchase; reuse, recycle and sometimes self-produce everyday necessaries like detergents. But these limitations entail an opening of sensuous-affective experience that is not only and not mainly constructed in terms of denial. As the exchange between Elisa and me testifies, cutting on heating does not mean being cold, but finding new (and better) ways of being warm – i.e. dressing up more appropriately. Similarly, when my participants talk about using the bike instead of the car, they always emphasise the cycling assemblage as having *so many positive aspects to it, right?: you save money, exercise, open air and... pollution that is avoided... so I do it with pleasure* – as Mirko says.

Their vegan transition is also productive in the sense that it shapes life and future projects, which acquire a political character. Mirko and Elisa, for instance, had been thinking for a while to move to Norway, because they like its wilderness, culture, well-paid jobs that allow much free time to cultivate personal interests, etc. They wanted to go there and teach Italian. But after they watched the documentary "Cowspiracy"[215] and realising the urgency of a transition to low-carbon sustainable societies, they have decided to become activists for veganism. They are now planning to study International Relations after their degree in Modern Languages in order to better influence world politics against farming and in favour of the environment.

Chiara, on her part, wants to go and live in an exotic warm country. This dream has also to do with nature and the search for novel, more harmonious, trans-human relations that she believes to be present in *less civilised* countries[216]. She would *like to have more contact with nature*, which to her means *living in a way that is, yeah, primitive.* This would have the aim of *distancing* from *all these technological things* that are integral to her life. Notice that the point she makes is about both knowledge and potency. She has an antipathy for this 'civilised' way of living because its *technological things diminish your capacity of perceiving the world*. For instance, living in a city for a whole life has the effect that one does not know how nature functions: *like the growth of a plant, animals who live freely.* These *very basic things of nature* one might not even ever have the chance to see. In contrast to this disabling condition, embodied and concrete *contact* with the

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[215] From this, they learnt about the grave condition of the planet's ecosystems, which in the documentary is mainly attributed to increasing world-wide consumption of meat, dairies and eggs. That one, powerful, documentary changed their 'mission' and vision of life and environmental issues is by itself testimony of the power of media in channelling desires. We shall go back to this in due time.

[216] She is also strongly moved by the idea that there she can *have the abundance of food that I can't have here [...]: the fruits I want throughout the year...* She loves, in fact, exotic fruits that are nonetheless tasteless and also too expensive in our part of the world: joyful becoming-imperceptible in the intensity of a taste.

world seems to afford more accurate ideas and increase the capacity to assemble well with it. Because *living with them you realise how they actually work and... and you have more of a contact, let's say, with how... this reality is.* Libidinal intensity of a becoming-primitive: again, a desire for Life, a cry against (late capitalist) assemblages that *diminish* (her) intelligence, life force, (political) potency[217].

This 'flight' opens the space for imagining new forms of livelihood. In the *warm country* where she would like to settle, in fact, Chiara would like to *lead a sustainable lifestyle*. This would entail: in terms of food, a *small vegetable garden so the fruits I don't need to buy*, or *buying them in a fair and sustainable way*; a *job* also de-linked from unsustainable and unfair global exchanges, for instance, being *a waiter in a bar* that sustains *sustainable businesses*; mobility would be *on foot slash by bike*… in sum, the possibility of *buying anything I need in a sustainable way* – or *making it myself*. Hence, the idea of going to live in an exotic country co-emerges with the prospect of new politics and economies. To the violence and unsustainability of the 'world out of control' where she now lives – complex, globalised, dominated by vested interests – Chiara opposes a more joyful one, entailing a *direct contact* with the *realities* of production and exchange that support her everyday life[218].

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[217] But, to be sure, this 'primitive ideal' is a social (we might even say post-colonial) fantasy/construct. Indeed, Chiara links her fascination for the exotic to the fact that *when I was young I let myself be enchanted by "Pocahontas"!*, the Disney movie. This does not change, though, its role within Chiara's libidinal economy.

[218] Although we should be more than wary about the (im)politically dangerous underside of this imaginary. Chiara's ideal new life is constructed as the *adoption* of a (pre-given) *lifestyle*. Yet this framing seems to emerge from neoliberal assemblages where individualisation prevents social actors from envisioning social change as a matter of collective mobilisation and creation of new worlds. Not by chance, maybe, Chiara frames this almost exclusively in terms of *consumption*. Furthermore, there is a sense in which this 'exotic' imaginary works to perpetuate unsustainable practices: as that and only that is the place where a truly sustainable lifestyle can be adopted, Chiara does not see what she could do here (e.g. buy organic local fruits and vegetables; buy old or hand-made furniture nearby; try – as much as possible – to work for conscious businesses; get to know nature by going to the countryside that surrounds the town). All this is postponed to when she will travel to the other side of the world.

6.3.2. Everybody should become vegan! – *Morality against desire*

In the sections above, I have argued that veganism introduces a strong concern over sustainability more generally. This becomes so intense to almost surpass animal welfare as a reason for not eating meat and animal derivatives, confirming what Twine (2017: 194) argues – that "it is not ontologically or normatively accurate to falsely dichotomise an 'environmental veganism' from a 'veganism for the animals', since the former is also the latter". The awareness of the ecological impacts of omnivorous diets functions in turn to reinforce the three participants' endorsement of plant-based ones – not only commendable because they spare animals from suffering, but also necessary to human (and other species') survival: since they believe that animal farming is responsible for 51% of total GHG emissions, there is no other measure that can *save the planet* better than the whole humanity becoming vegan[219]. But at this point the potential dangers of such a libidinally strong investment in/by veganism also start to become evident. In what follows, I would like to concentrate on two of these: unsustainable side-effects in everyday energy uses; veganism becoming a universal and abstract, nihilistic, moral imperative. I will consider them in turn.

- *How irrelevant* all the rest is...: Consuming earth

Recall Elisa's narrative about her acquired parsimony with energy consumption in the house. Mirko comments as follows:

M: [...] maybe for me it's the other way around: I mean, becoming vegan I found out how irrelevant domestic waste is

E: yeah, no...

M: and so now... I mean, while before I was more careful about every single thing, now instead I am still quite careful with waste. But I no longer refrain from using energy if that means an effective confort [sic]. I mean: if the matter is switching off the light

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[219] There is already in this move a certain danger that the anti-anthropocentric potentiality and ethico-political implications of vegan discourses are pushed to the background and instead align with neoliberal technocratic 'management' of human survival. In fact, questions around <u>quantities</u> of water, energy, CO_2, etc. often supplant political ones regarding energy security, self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty, equity, more-than-human relationalities. The issue of bare <u>self-preservation</u> comes centre stage to the expense of questions regarding <u>what life</u>.

when I am not using it – of course I do it, for example. But, if I want to be a little more comfortable in a room, for example… […] Because at ho--- at home I want to wear little, that's it. So maybe, […] rather than, I mean, being… concerned about switching off the central heating I switch it on… without any problem! While before maybe I would spend winters I don't wanna say in a cold house, but being slightly cold to save energy.

A: mh

M: now that I found out, as we were saying, that maybe I don't switch off the central heating for one day because I want to save – because of pollution. Then I eat a hamburger and I have fucked up two years of non-heating… just with a hamburger! I mean, so becoming vegan I now no longer care much about this. […] I mean, I don't waste energy: I use it because I think it is something we have and it is just right to get some confort [sic] out of it[220]*.*

We see an opposite movement compared to Elisa's: cutting on energy consumption on one side (the diet), constructed as the most significant, gives permission to indulge in <u>greater</u> energy consumption in other spheres of everyday life. This might be seen as a rather straightforward instance of "rebound effect"[221] (see, e.g., Berkhout et al. 2000). Yet, I think it might be productive to engage in some more detail with the desiring/libidinal – and therefore <u>political</u> – implications of this dynamic.

On the one hand, we might argue that Mirko's desire is rendered freer to express itself: against the frustrating and sorrowful encounter with cold, by putting into their relative place domestic uses of energy and the disciplinary discourses that surround them, veganism apparently allows him to better relate to embodied desires. On the other, nonetheless, this 'liberation' brings with it the danger that many territorialised energy-

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[220] It is worth noticing, in passing, that this statement reinforces the idea that there are anthropocentric characters to my three participants' view of energy (transitions). Chiara, Mirko and Elisa often refer to "energy" as that elaborated by human beings *for* human beings (*light bulbs*, *wind farms*, *solar panels*, *oil*) – in line with molar assemblages of enunciation and state of things that conceive energy mechanistically as something that performs work to the benefit of human beings: mechanisation, house appliances, large scale electricity provision, car/air/train mobility, etc. In this, they differ much from most participants, who self-admittedly talked of "energy" in (molecular) ways that they themselves recognized as 'strange' or unexpected.

[221] This refers to the effect whereby energy saving on one side promotes even more consumption on the other. A typical example of rebound effect would be the increase in car engines' energy efficiency, which facilitates and thus prompts greater use of the car and, as a result, more emissions in absolute terms.

intensive and polluting assemblages are left unchallenged, and with them the whole (libidinal) economy from and in which they take form. Mirko and Elisa's fantasies around their future life encapsulate this very evidently: a simple everyday life in a little nice farmhouse on a fjord – Mirko, Elisa, many animals, the aurora borealis and…

E: and for me one of the things that is particularly important, contrary to you [Mirko] that, it seems to me, you don't really care much about it: I want to see the world. I mean, I want to go to India, I want to go to Africa…
A: mh
E: I mean: I want to see as many things as possible. While… to you it doesn't… I reckon, fascinate you that much this idea – if I got it right. I mean really if I'll have any spare money it'll be devoted
A: to that
E: to this: to look around. I mean… I am really fond of things that are different. Like the idea of walking through the streets… dunno, in India, with all the spices, the stuff… the… I like to observe things, as I said. So…
M: mmmm to me it looks something… to me--- I don't even mention it because it seems such an obvious thing. 'Cause I'd like to go like to America, to Canada, to Greenland, to China – but when I say China I don't mean the bi--- not much… I mean, I would like to go to Beijing maybe […] but when I say China I mean Tibet: <u>that</u> I mean when I say China.

Inter-continental flights are recognised as one of the greatest sources of CO_2 emissions. Yet, Elisa and Mirko, self-proclaimed environmentalists, do not seem much concerned about taking one any time they can. Traversed by the omnivorous desires of a society that is determined to consume *anything*, neither Elisa nor Mirko ever question the *obvious* fact that anyone would like and should be able to *see* the whole world. Elisa puts a 'Like' to KLM on Facebook. She consumes difference, but the most beautiful and advertised. Curiosity over otherness is already re-inscribed into sameness by the very act of going somewhere to *see* things; and crucial is not the <u>quality</u> of these encounters, but their <u>quantity</u> (*as many things as possible*). The world is made an object of consumption and leisure that needs to be appropriate(d) to the gaze of the tourists: colourful streets full of spices (not beggars), unspoiled mountains (not landfills), secret and therefore exciting places (not slums), *et cetera*.

Now, this forceful drive cannot be reduced to a lack of knowledge and information about the adverse effects of flying, as information-deficit models would suggest. When I ask them whether they care or think about using the airplane, at the beginning they do not even understand: *do you mean if we're scared?* When I specify I am talking about pollution, they both say (convincedly) *no*. as Mirko explains:

First, because the airplane is something that is extremely useful, first of all. Second: as I have already mentioned, means… I mean, as far as I know even if right now 7 billion people were to stop using means of transport, in any case we wouldn't avoid the abyss. We would only slow down the process a bit. Because they only constitute 13% of emissions […] and also, means of transport do not use up so much food, they do not use up so much water, and all those other things that animals instead--- they do not poo like crazy! So in the end… there are many things to consider. So […] if I need to go to Brighton, <u>I fly</u>.

Despite showing awareness of its polluting effects and contested nature, flying is justified through what seems a rational argument (about resources, pollution, overall impact, etc.) supplemented by numbers and statistics.

Yet, Mirko's apparently 'rational' argument is haunted by a blind spot, a knot that <u>does not</u> make sense. His definition of an unsustainable practice is that *if <u>seven billion people did it</u> we could not live, or anyway damages would be very significant*; further, he claims to be ready to give up anything that is not sustainable and necessary. But his argument about the *7 billion people* stopping *using means of transport* does not address the question of what would happen if all of them were to start taking intercontinental flights all the time. And the 'fault' in the argument is not casual: it is functional to the <u>impossibility</u> of thinking a future without intercontinental flights. Needless to say, this impossibility is in turn determined by <u>collective</u> libidinal pushes and 'regimes of visibility' – in particular, the centrality of mobility in global capitalism. It is <u>this</u> (libidinal) economy that here drives Mirko's rationality. In other words, stock market flows, travel magazines and photos of oceanic paradises, exotic commodities, fashionable cosmopolitanism and the myths of distant, unspoiled, lands… as these are channelled through the paths of desire of global capital, they take Mirko and Elisa along.

Counting, as many mainstream policies do, on information provision and individuals' rational and moral decision-making for behaviour change thus appears at best partial and at worse dangerous. Because what is thinkable, imaginable, doable within a given societal arrangement seems to be strongly dependent not only on given states of things that to a certain extent constrain social actors' range of choices and possibilities; but also on lines of unconscious desire that are patterned around "axiomatics" that imply differential 'powers of actualisation', so to speak (Deleuze and Guattari 2000). Attributing the main responsibility of ecological degradation to one single practice (omnivorous diets) without calling into question the unsustainable capitalist axiomatic is likely to be ineffective because it remains within its problematisation; simultaneously, it might divert attention from all other unsustainable practices that are part of its assemblages.

- *Extremely stupid not to respect nature* – rationality as crypto-morality

Once veganism is constructed as the way to *save the planet*, it becomes for my three participants a *duty* for all the (*good*) people who care about future generations, plants, animals and, more generally, life on earth. At this point, curiously, Mirko, Elisa and Chiara tend to stop expressing those desiring and affective dimensions that are part of their transition and instead begin to emphasise its moral-rational character[222]. I provocatively ask Chiara why should we respect non-human nature at all:

because we are part of nature so, apart from being wrong, it is extremely stupid not to respect nature! [...] Then, it's wrong but first of--- first of all it's stupid, I think. Just because of that: 'cause it's a bit like... I mean, our life is based on nature. So... for this reason is wrong, I think.

Chiara says that we should respect nature firstly as a matter of being rational – i.e. not *stupid*. The issue with this is two-fold. First, the rationality to which Chiara appeals is a very specific one – coinciding with self-preservation[223]. Then, what is natural and rational acquires moral connotations to become *right*: it is stupid to undermine the bases of our livelihood, therefore one who does it is *wrong*. In this process, anthropocentrism

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[222] I believe this does not happen by chance, as it responds to typically Western-modern conceptions of the mind as abstract and transcendent, the body as material and situated. Hence, appealing to the former is functional to positing the logic of an argument as universally applicable.

[223] Notably, that human beings are, naturally, self-preserving is part of a very situated, Hobbesian, anthropology typical of modernity that remains unacknowledged but that, ironically, foregrounded humans' exploitation and degradation of planet.

(will-to-power: not to get extinguished *as human beings*) is surreptitiously reinstated in the form of a self-preserving rationality that in turn becomes a crypto-morality: everybody *ought to* become vegan in the interest of self-preservation. This abstract imperative opens our second, related, problem. By positing one abstract ideal of what life is and should be as unquestionable, anything that does not conform to this *normality*[224], *rationality*, *good* is considered *bad* and *wrong* and thus to a certain extent denied a right to exist.

In particular, all those embodied pulls that are irreducible to this schema are condemned and repressed: *mere* matters of desire. For instance, the *information* that animals and their derivatives are not *necessary* to human subsistence and are ecologically and energetically very impacting implies that desiring a piece of meat is not rational and, as a consequence, wrong – a selfish indulgence into the fleshy intensity of the bloody and salty taste of meat. As Mirko reports saying to his father: *don't you realise that you killed an animal just because you felt like it?* And as Chiara puts this: *if something looks necessary to you, but it is not in truth, then you should simply modify your attitude*. *The factor that most counts is in any case the mind*, while *the physical side* is just *a tiny part*. Embodied longings are thus constructed as fully and infinitely malleable by an abstract, (apparently) disembodied, rationality that can discern 'good' ones and, at will, discard 'bad' ones. Further, those, like the vegans, who follow this kind of rationality can claim *moral superiority* over those who do not.

Admittedly, that Chiara says she can behave-choose what is 'right' by simply modifying her attitude might be interpreted as an instance of successful "ABC" implementation. Yet, on the one hand, we might contest this interpretation on methodological/theoretical grounds: at a closer look, in fact, 'the will of the mind' appears itself the result of yet another series of lines that are both desiring and social – we have seen it with Mirko and Elisa's investment in-to flying, with Chiara's pull towards raw veganism as a way of enhancing her bodily energy and improve a body shape that she perceives as un-fitting[225]. On the other hand, even if the ABC interpretation were right, the result would not be straightforwardly desirable. Apart from the (politically) questionable idea that one should subject the body to a heteronomously defined morality; we might also notice that desire's repression brings about a series of sorrowful affects that seem almost existentially unsustainable.

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[224] Chiara says that in following her ethical commitments to respect animal welfare and reduce her impacts on the planet she feels *I am behaving just normally!*

[225] It is quite notable (and telling about the socially constituted, desiring, nature of our 'choices'), that she sticks so firmly to her raw diet because (among other things) it allows keep her weight in check.

Following Nietzsche (1984; Deleuze 2002) we might see this affirmation of a transcendent morality over the body as an instance of ascetic nihilism. As such, abstention from animal products turns out to be at times life-denying. For instance, recall that Mirko initially gave up meat only to make Elisa happy. When he was young, he even had an aggressive relationship to animals and *used to throw rocks at the cat without any problem*. Only afterwards he got to *know* that eating animals *is not right*. Yet, his talk is strangely full of references to the 'pleasures of meat':

M: […] if it came out that eating meat is just good <u>for the animal</u>, that he [sic] <u>wants</u> to be killed, that animals actually <u>absorb</u> $\underline{\textit{CO}_2}$ *and release oxygen in the air [Elisa and I laugh]… if you were to tell me: all these things are <u>true</u> and meat is good for your health, and I found out that all is the other way around… I would not feel defeated, quite the contrary! I am <u>happy</u> to eat a cotoletta [fried pork cutlet], do you understand?*
A: mh
M: I mean I don't do it for bothering other people. I do what I think is the right thing to do, fuck aaaargh!

His body is pulled towards pork cutlets, his mind pushes them away. But this leaves a strange sense of peeve, evident in the very heated pace and tone of his last remark. Indeed, my three participants often admit that it is *difficult* to be vegans in a society that continuously presents them with meat and dairy temptations – *and how can you not surrender?!* Not surrendering implies an <u>effort</u>, a saying *no* to things they would eat *<u>happily</u>*.

To be doubly sure, I am <u>not</u> proposing that a plant-based diet goes against a 'natural' desire for meat. Quite the contrary, I do believe that a diet which does not procure suffering to animals can be life-affirmative. What I am nonetheless pointing to is the danger of <u>imposing</u> it to recalcitrant bodies, in a way that is blind and deaf to desire. Because this implies a certain amount of hidden violence towards oneself and others; a sort of envious rage, what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*, against those who <u>do</u> respond to embodied desires. I could personally experience this as a non-vegan[226] in the sometimes sorrowful assemblages that would take form while being in their company, their

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[226] When we met I was (attentively) omnivorous; vegetarian as I am writing.

prejudices, a subtle hostility[227]; but also in a certain rivalry and dislike even among themselves…

M: We need to concentrate on not hating people: "come on Mirko, keep calm: they don't know things either, you should see what they'd do in case things were explained to them in the right way. Keep calm, Mirko! Keep calm…!"

It is as if the imperative to self-preservation could co-exist with a resented hate for Life and desire in their complexity, irreducibility, becoming…

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[227] A sorrow that, by the way, can certainly be seen as partly responsible for the critical remarks I move to part of the ways they live with veganism. I have tried as much as I could to not reduce these affects to a resent-ful reaction, though. Working with and through my own discomfort creatively, the effort has been to evaluate the life-affirmative character of 'their' assemblages and the closures that diminish their emancipatory potential, to possibly free them up.

6.3.3. Veganism and the (im)political

Now, the section above suggests that my participants construct for themselves a morally superior stance compared to non-vegans by denying/repressing some desires that nonetheless move (through) them. Hence, we can see a nihilistic drive at work, which has some politically dangerous consequences that are worth unpacking. First of all, the divisive contempt towards otherness that I have just described forecloses alliances and contact with different epistemologies and systems of values; the opportunity to connect and communicate with subjects who might not straightforwardly endorse veganism and yet share a commitment to sustainability. Secondly, the remarks above open the possibility of seeing this approach to veganism not only as a matter of trans-species alliances and joyful encounters, but also as an expression of a will-to-power that seems quite at odds with an emancipatory ecological project. I argued that denying themselves the satisfaction of some bodily pleasures in the name of moral values puts my three participants in the condition of claiming *moral superiority*. Yet, continuing to follow some of Niezsche's (1984) suggestions, this can be seen as a reaction against the fact of having been put into inferior positions at other moments in their lives.

Consider Mirko's remarks about his childhood:

let's say that I [...] have spent the whole of my life to try and save, basically. Because when I was young anyway I was the only one – like at school – to thi--- think somewhat to these things. I mean, if I talked about these things with other mates they'd tease me, basically [we laugh]. Or they'd go: "what kind of problem does he have?!"

Mirko says that he has spent his life *to try and save* and that he was teased for this, put in a condition of social inferiority[228]. Yet, his refraining from energy consumption and animal products, once inserted in a discourse of <u>planetary</u> saving, becomes an entitlement to superiority over those who had first cheated him – and all those like them. This will to affirm him-self and his position becomes quite striking in the following extract, which is

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[228] It is possible to see a social class dynamic here. Although he is talking about energy, the word he uses ("*risparmio*", *saving*), recalls <u>money</u> saving, rather than energy saving. Mirko indeed confirms that *technically speaking, my parents as far as I can remember they used to talk only about money issues; 'Mirko, there's the heating on... we spend money for nothing if heat gets out...'.* In a world (and for all matters Vittorio Veneto in the 1990s) driven by money accumulation and conspicuousness, the parsimony that comes from being poor could have been socially marginalising.

worth quoting at length. He is talking about *that… Mala Ala, the one who got the Nobel prize for peace*. He asks himself, *what in fact did she do?!*

I mean if a girl who's like 20-year-old – I think, won the Nobel for peace… I mean, if she won one, I should get <u>*fifty*</u> *Nobel for peace, for what I am doing. Because she fights for the rights for the females*[229]*. You can fight as much as you want for the rights of the females, but in thirty years, when we'll no longer have any food and any water, when as they are forecasting there will be three hundred millions environmental refugees… climate refugees – dunno how to say it exactly – because there will be desertification everywhere, there will be an increased level of water--- the level of the sea risen by seven meters and it will have submerged the bigger cities, all this… are you still fighting for the rights of the females?! You're an asshole! I mean, these are the problems we have now! This is the moment to solve these problems. If she wins one Nobel prize for… I mean: you're once again missing the point in the whole argument! I have respect for the females, but not…* <u>*for fuck's sake*</u>*! You give rights… I mean, no no not… my God! It seems obvious to me that the females should have the rights, but I'm sorry this is not our* <u>*priority*</u> *now. This is not the person to which one should give the Nobel:* <u>*I*</u> *should get the Nobel, fuck! Yesterday when I was at the university I was talking to a former classmate. I explained to her why she should become vegan as well – this happened the other the other… the day before yesterday, and she [Elisa] was not there, she had gone home, I was there alone – and I got to the class 15 minutes late just because I took my time to thoroughly explain to her ho---… and she's stayed there for the whole time looking at me wide-eyed, asking questions… I managed to make her* <u>*super-*</u>*interested! She also felt guilty!! That… I mean, of course I should not make people feel guilty because I get the opposite effect – they feel accused. I mean, I ha--- I managed to make her feel involved in what I was saying! She reflected on what I said. I got to the class a quarter of hour late just for this! I didn't think about myself, I didn't think "oh there will be exams soon, it's better you arrive in time for the class"; I thought: "this is the moment for change. I need to explain to this person* <u>*immediately,*</u>

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[229] Sic. He often uses the term "*femmina*" (female) instead of the more common "donna" (woman). "Femmina" is normally used to indicate non-human females or, when used (usually by men) for talking about women, it often has a derogatory connotation – as if women were no more than (inferior) female animals. The performative effect of this word choice might be instrumental to de-legitimising and minimising the issue of gender inequalities by shifting it on a plane of 'just (human) animals'. Mirko also often calls Elisa "*femmina*".

right now – because I won't see her again: now the undergraduate degree ends and I only have exams to give – this person I won't see again! – this is the right moment to educate her! I don't give a fuck of the class! I rather not going, in case! I talk to her! To me they should give the Nobel!!! Right! because this is… this is it, now. These are the things now--- but not not to me in sense… to the people like me. Because, okay, I do these things and I save--- I mean, I sacrifice the class for explaining to her these things that are extremely important.

Of this notable passage, some key points are worth noticing. First, the affective quality and intensity of Mirko's long talk and argument. He is truly upset and truly excited – pointing to a very powerful libidinal pull towards the perspective of *winning a Nobel prize*: becoming famous, becoming powerful and influential. This substantiates what has been suggested above, that veganism as an *ideology* and life choice is far more than the rational, moral and disinterested (or other-oriented) choice that Mirko (and Chiara and Elisa) purport it to be. Veganism here works as a machine (of desire) that makes Mirko hyperbolically deserving (the *fifty Nobel prizes*) as a saviour (or saver!) of the planet – while without it he was some kind of mentally ill person. The hyperbolical language of catastrophe is also functional to this end: it re-asserts and emphasises the importance of ecological concerns as the Priority for the human race and the *moral superiority* of those who work towards its mitigation[230].

The life-denying implications of such a position are evident both in the language of *sacrifice* that Mirko employs and in the pride with which he talks about making the girl feel guilty. As we see, he is in no way concerned about her desires and the violence and sorrow of instilling an affect of hate for oneself; nor is he willing to create an affective, mutual, alliance. The only thing that matters is making her a vegan: conforming to his morality. True, he does say that making people guilty is not the most desirable

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[230] A point that is worth noticing in passing is that Mirko's strong images suggest that his perceiving humanity in a suspended, precarious, condition involves much fear and anxiety. People in power are seen as uncaring and ineffective in effectuating change; the economy also seems unable to self-regulate. Veganism, once attributed world-changing power, affords a hopeful perspective: if everybody became vegan, we could be saved, there is a chance of hope for the future. And veganism can be enacted, right now, by anyone, without much effort and without waiting for politicians. This starts to give us a sense of how much the force and libidinal hold of 'vegan desire' arises from its reassuring promise of an (imaginary, full) solution: a quasi-religious eschatological narrative of fall and redemption that displaces social struggle (again in line with Nietzsche's suggestions around the reactive will-to-power that drives religious commitments – see Deleuze 2002).

thing. But this, again, does not come out of a concern for the other: it is a matter of tactic, of how to best implement his project.

But there is also a much wider political danger. The extract above suggests that Mirko strongly desires, despite being apparently critical of, Nobel prizes. He thereby appears lidibinally drawn to the same system of power that he is contesting. In this context, his veganism might be seen functioning as a sort of perversion, in Lacanian terms[231]: by condensing the problems of planetary survival on animal farming, it poses itself as an (illusory) way of closing the cut of the ecologic crisis/damage. Constructing a partial solution as universal and flawless allows Mirko to maintain an enduring investment in the system that has produced the problem in the first place. The danger of this 'perversion' is that it lets desire 'sit' on a one-way solution, preventing the creation of a subject position able to critically investigate and challenge unsustainable energy use as systemically built into capitalist assemblages of growth. Hence his veganism, instead of being emancipatory, risks to end up reproducing the dynamics that have caused ecological degradation and his social inferiority[232].

That adopting veganism entails the danger of accepting or even promoting a greenwashed and bloodwashed version of (unsustainable and violent) capitalism is supported by a conversation between me and Mirko[233], after dinner while they are channel surfing. Talking about the role of changing socio-economic models for sustainability, he says he finds the idea *let's say… fanciful.* He admits he used to give more credence to

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[231] I thank Fabio Vighi who made this visible to me during a brief and informal conversation on the matter.

[232] Something similar happens on a different scale and level, familial this time, for Elisa – whose case there is unfortunately no space to delve into. She suffers from being put in an inferior position with respect to her brother. Simultaneously, she would like that all of her family members became vegan in order to show her love. But this can be seen as a reactive will-to-power: seeking recognition and control by having other people giving up all desires she does not accept (Deleuze 2002). Her efforts are frustrated and thus reproduce her position of inferiority. But we should be weary that, in some sense, it could even be worse if they were met. Meat and cheese eating have, in fact, come to condense all the violence and inequality that cut through her family as a result of male power. If it were given up, she would happily find back her place within the family. But its latent chauvinism would not by this token be challenged. Hence, Elisa would be even more subjected to gender inequalities because superficially reconciled with them. That this is a true danger is suggested by my impressions about her relationship with Mirko (with whom she was, notably, successful in changing diet): *While we are sitting for dinner, the interaction between Mirko and Elisa is strange, and reminds me of a remnant of the 1950s: Elisa, take this; Elisa, bring that; Elisa, are you going to prepare chamomile? At the beginning, I would laugh because I thought it was an affectation, but I am not sure it is completely.*

[233] Significantly, Elisa did not take part to the conversation despite being there.

issues of political economy, and in fact he wanted to study Politics. After becoming vegan, though, he's more sceptical: *you can talk about all the migrants you want, all the chauvinism you want, all the economy you want… but if we do not become vegan, we extinguish.* This is the *truly important* thing: *giving up certain things* (animal products). All the rest is *secondary: like looking at a football match. That's okay as well, but we know that it is useless*. Political lines of flight, the search for different economy-ecologies, are thus reterritorialised on the current system[234]. And interestingly, the creative and desiring political constitution of a different socio-economic-ecologic existence is reduced to that same will-to-power that we saw above: self-preservation, the imperative not to get extinguished, which dumbs and silences political struggle around <u>what existence</u> is preferable for our more-than-human collectives.

Further, concrete, evidences of this compliance are to be found in little everyday gestures, like the pride for a cheap buy on Amazon (Elisa's laptop) or Zalando (a pair of trainers). These suggest a blindness to the violence entrenched in the capitalist economy at large. To be sure, there is an effort to check that the products they buy do not exploit people. Elisa has even *done some researches on the internet: there are programs of… workers' sustainability… I don't know, I don't even know how to say it!* But hair-splitting knowledge/attention regarding every food ingredient and additive deriving from animals is hardly met in other spheres[235]. This is not to say that everybody, especially if this young, can have complex information about capitalist global economy. Again, what interests me are the regimes of visibility that veganism affords. Saying that plant-based food is <u>inherently</u> *super-respectful* (Elisa)[236] tends to hide or downplay the not-so-cruelty-free nature of the market economy at large – the human beings in between, the unequal flows of money, precarious labour and power that subtend its under-priced commodities[237]. Capitalist systematic exploitation of people and non-human nature are

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[234] Even during our conversation, Mirko was being fleetingly fascinated by the idea of mutually helpful communities, the affective intensity of seasonality, a renewed alliance with local ecologies – a becoming-poor, becoming-collective, becoming-soil, becoming-limit… Soon reduced to the *giving up* of animal farming.

[235] For instance, I was struck by them being completely unaware of what Monsanto is and of the issues surrounding GM crops that make peasants dependent on multinationals' patents and herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers that are extremely ecologically impacting.

[236] Which resonates with its circulating definition of "cruelty free".

[237] It might not be by chance that Chiara, Mirko and Elisa believe that a sustainable transition can be enacted by people through their everyday actions (in the market), believing that it is consumers who decide what is or not produced. While, for them, the *humanitarian level*, for instance of *children being exploited*, *is more of a matter of*

hidden from view by the blood-free image of an apple. Libidinal compliance to a world of consumption, affordability, multinational control remains unquestioned[238].

One last point to make about the depoliticising dangers of this veganism is that it sometimes becomes a discourse of Truth that silences contestation. Mirko holds that *all of our discussions end up on vegans because the vegans are – being vegan: being vegan is the cause if you will, the big cause of all it's happening*, ecologically-wise. Compared to this, all other sources of pollution and forms of *waste* are *small*. This he has *understood by getting information*. The information comes from *the UN*, *FAO and all that stuff*, it is on this that Mirko and Elisa and Chiara act. But, I provocatively ask: what *if paradoxically you'd find out that the numbers were wrong?* After a loud laugh, Mirko replies that they *would adapt* to the changing situation. And if this might be seen as an expression of that openness to the new and critical stance towards any given knowledge that I have pointed out above, Mirko's further comments problematise this, at least in part; or show its dangerous undersides:

if it came… <u>God</u>, if Jesus Christ came and told me: "I I <u>swear</u>, look: I am Jesus Christ and I tell you that reality is like this and this and that…" – thanks, Jesus Christ, I didn't know it…! So just give me some time to settle back again

Now, we see language characterised by so religious rhetoric despite Mirko and Elisa being self-proclaimed atheists. Everything that is happening is driven by One Cause (like God), we know this is true (almost like a revealed truth, although it is numbers, statistics and international organisations to 'reveal' it), we therefore act in accordance to this truth in order to save ourselves (following the Word as a way into Paradise). A truth

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politics. Our society is in fact investing money and desire in mainstreaming sustainability while shadowing its own systemically exploitative nature.

[238] Chiara, for instance, claims to be favourable, in principle, to a capitalist economy that generates economic inequalities, provided it does not generate environmental damage and it does not exploit people. Interestingly, she defines *capitalism* as a system that *produces money*. But cannot we see here a libidinal attraction to capital as a self-generative, all-powerful, "full body"? The fetishism that Marx (2003) identified as <u>the</u> capitalist ideology *par excellence*? The ideological nature of this position is also suggested by my participants reiterating that cows are taking food away from people: *people in the world die of hunger because we are giving food to cows instead of giving it to people! […] cows never die of hunger, people do!* The logic is very similar to Marx's Luddites', who believed it was technology's fault that they were losing jobs. The missing term, in both positions, is capitalism.

that is certain and stable is sought for in front of the complexity of reality and the uncertainty of knowledge. This, we might say, wards off anxiety but also responsibility of choice: if I know that what I am doing is *right* that means I do not need to take it on myself as subject. I only need to follow it: *Jesus Christ* tells me the truth and I conform to it.

Yet, this search for a universal Truth can amount to the capitulation of critique and political contestation about what reality is, how it is constructed by existent systems of power/knowledge and how it might be different. In turn, it opens the way to the determination of what is real, rational and good in terms of environmental politics by others in their stead – who define ends, means and directions. There is a paradoxical character in this position: while reiterating Western and modern dualisms between matter and thought, desire and rationality, body and mind, human and non-human nature, etc. (see above); this *vegan ideology* simultaneously rejects what arguably are the most emancipatory tendencies of Modernity – its quest for critical thinking, self-direction and rejection of hetero-determination (Kant 1995: 45; Foucault 1997). Instead, a dispositive of power/knowledge is generated: technocratic powers of 'environmental regulation' put to use scientific measures that, as the word of God, discipline bodies and desires by establishing what is True and Right (i.e. sustainable).

6.3.4. Coda

These cases, while surely being singular, are also collective. Apparently psychic dynamics of which I talked are not individual properties or faults. That Mirko reacts to his inferiority through a violent will-to-power is dependent on his being structurally situated in an unequal system in the first place. Similarly, the perversion of constructing veganism as one-way, easy, solution to complex planetary issues arises within the "perverse social structures" Hoggett (2010) that characterise neoliberal societies, where complexity is believed to be amenable to "quick fixes". Resentment against omnivorous people arises from the fact that being vegan is *difficult*; but this might have very little to do with the bare abstinence from animal products: what makes veganism an effortful endeavour, a sacrifice, that triggers violent frustrations is a social context in which meat is continuously promoted as better than plant-based food (and the vegan as an almost inferior, lesser and minor social subject who is constantly called to justify his/her almost 'deviant' food assemblages). Indeed, in the moment these people find other vegans with whom to share their subject-positions, identity and values, what often looks like a resentful and reactive position against mainstream food and energy assemblages turns into a productive endeavour in which new life-forms, sensitivities and practices find a space to emerge. Finally, these affective expressions have nothing of a "fantasy": they concern very real and material arrangements (e.g. unequal wealth distribution, visibility, power). Hence, addressing the above critiques cannot be a matter of working with and on people as individuals: the movement needs to be collective and it should entail the reshaping of power-ridden assemblages (of eating, but also consuming, producing and reproducing life), the creation of spaces for desire to be cultivated – even contested – in its diversity and singular political demands.

6.4. Fourth line of becoming: becoming-bacteria

> *There is a complex aggregate: the becoming-animal of men, packs of animals, elephants and rats, winds and tempests, bacteria sowing contagion. A single Furor.*
>
> Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 243)

Bacteria are a minor collective in contemporary societies although not, of course, in terms of quantity. A number of devices and products are deployed in a constant fight against this proliferating and uncontrollable population: laundry detergents; anti-bacterial hand washes, hand gels, sanitising fluids for fruits and vegetables; anti-biotics, vaccines. There is, in becoming-bacteria a special quality of (vital) resistance against the deadening effort of our societies to sanitise and control life by reducing it to "a material world that matches its expectations" (Ingold 2010: 9).

When we met Valerio I said that, for him, going to live in his house in front of the lake was some kind of (creative) repetition – a going back to his 'origins'. There are traces of his past in the house where he now lives, like this lamp:

I noticed it upon entering the home. I was impressed by a certain visual smoothness and by the evident act of recycling that it involved. Afterwards, Valerio *explained to me that that was the bucket where they used to wash him when he was young.* Repetition and creation. *He lived on the other side of the lake, in Farra, with his parents and his sister. At that time there were no bathrooms in the house, so you needed to go outside. But the mother would warm up the water for bathing, put the children in the bucket and then pour it over for washing them.*

He talks both excitedly and from elsewhere, a place where he is becoming-child (again). What he is specifically re-actualising, in this moment, is not a simple practice from his childhood, one now dismissed by urbanisation/modernisation of rural areas and the rationalisation of water provisioning and sewage systems. It is the affective intensity of a more sensuous livelihood, one in which the smallest everyday action was charged with a sort of enchantment, bodily thrill, that came from the closeness of bodies and things – experienced as lively matter…

In telling me this, he explains that back then "nothing would go wasted": the sewage that you'd produce in the outside toilet would be collected and spread in the vegetable garden. He seems not to mind the idea and indeed he regrets that you can no longer do it because "the sewage system pollutes much more". I notice that it wouldn't be possible to do that in cities though, and we joke on the fact that things would probably end up on someone's head!

Valerio regrets the loss of this world of affective closeness to things – smelly, warm, colourful, humid. He, like Homica, challenges the rigid binaries between objects and waste in praising a time when any kind of matter found its useful role in the circular economy of mountain rural life. Even toilet sewage.

It is quite striking that Valerio is so libidinally driven towards this 'dirty' past, as he often looks obsessed with the dangers of contamination and disease. For instance, he always puts the flour he buys from local producers in the freezer, otherwise, he tells me, a bacterium forms, which causes intestine cancer. At the same time, being (back) to the place of infancy creates a zone of proximity between his present-as-civilised and a past of old toilets when bacteria, instead of being enemies, were the co-habiting creatures of functioning ecosystems[239]. It sets in motion a process that deterritorialises him from a certain preoccupation with both self-preservation and self-affirmation (see above), towards a becoming-invisible, becoming-multitude (bacteria always form multitudes), becoming-imperceptible.

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[239] It should be noticed that Valerio suffered some years ago from a cancer that the doctors said would cause his death in three months' time. It was incurable. After a moment of resignation, he started to assume all kinds of natural remedies (from shaman to Chinese). The cancer has now stopped growing. It might be that his fear/obsession with contamination and disease (also ascribable to a logic of "immunisation") is linked to this traumatic experience and a will to live. But then also the fascination with the 'dirtiness' of his infancy would be a becoming-young, becoming-healthy, becoming-strong in alliance with (instead of against) bacteria.

While we walk through what Valerio has made his storehouse (an old and abandoned hotel), the theme of life and death returns as a refrain in his thoughts, researches and art production.

We move towards an area where there are works made of glass, in which there are colourful strings of cling film; they are in different shapes. "I wondered why I were putting so much effort to give life to frames that are not alive for real?" so the idea came to his mind to put bacteria into his works, which he looked for around the world: "here we are, in this way I properly made living paintings, or better, immortal paintings because when human beings will disappear they will remain alive".

For reasons that are beyond the interest and scope of this thesis, immortality holds a very intense position for Valerio. And bacteria are the immortal beings *par excellence*[240]. Collecting and collaborating with bacteria generates, for him, a space of immortality where he can produce and feel (infinitely) *alive* like his works of art.

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[240] He tells me that when he was commissioned the design for the setup of a natural history museum, he also made a *scale of life, where at the beginning he put "immortal bacteria" because they divide and in practice they never die.*

That he experiences bacteria-alliances as a matter of life-affirmation rather than life-threat is evident from an apparently banal occurrence of our day together. As a break during the morning, we decided to have some dried chestnuts, that he had picked up in autumn in the woods close to the house. At a certain point, I let one of them fall on the ground. I picked it up and ate it nonchalantly; but he looked at me, half surprised and half seriously admired: it had been so long since last time he saw someone doing that! Nowadays, he tells me, people would just throw it away because they are afraid of dirt, of bacteria. He was pleasantly moved by my 'savageness' in eating things fallen on the ground. And in fact, later, *he offers me half carob, and washes it. But he says that he normally does not wash it because it's good to eat bacteria: otherwise the body becomes more vulnerable – the body, if it's healthy, "destroys everything"*.

I believe it was also the intensity of this aliveness, this becoming-bacteria, becoming-imperceptibly-immortal, becoming-young-and-healthy to bring him back to the lake of his infancy. But what is of most interest for our discussion is that he is, in this, brought (back) to an affective continuity with the land (not in the sense of territory, but of fertile soil) – something that proves beneficial for local ecosystems, economies and cultures. We have already seen how his purchase of organic foods (alive and grown together with packs of bacteria) co-emerged with different models of exchange: ethical purchasing groups, gift, local direct purchase. But the sheer fact of being in the countryside also makes for a partial self-sufficiency. He gathers: *last year he bought very little salad because in front of the house dandelion grows and so throughout the summer and until September he ate that.* He self-produces ---- and in strange alliances…

He explains to me that many people here, almost everybody, have small pieces of land that they cultivate for themselves. For the first time, last year, he also planted potatoes[241]. *[...] He seized on the fact that a friend from Vicenza told him that he found out some bacteria that naturally make the soil fertile and more productive than the chemically treated ones. So they wanted to set up an experimental project and then sell these things. They asked him to build a small conservatory where to grow vegetables: they wanted to try with and without conservatory; and then a plantation without bacteria, which Valerio took photographs of every day to show the differences. So he started a bit by chance. Salad, onion, leeks – you needed to plant one salad and one onion; beans – ancient*

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[241] Which we ate for lunch during our day together. Together with the friend's salami, the home-made bread, organic spelt and a fresh orange juice that I made by manually squeezing oranges (both bought through ethical purchasing groups), organic red wine.

varieties; and corn, which he is still eating because production was abundant. With corn, he makes Chinese-style soups.

By moving to Alpago, Valerio is repeating – but repetition is also always difference – that becoming-bacteria of his childhood. The traditional vegetable garden is now an experimental agricultural project; ancient bean varietals[242] are recovered through new methods; the traditional corn is deterritorialised from polenta to Chinese soups. Remarkably, the fertiliser is no longer sewage from old outside toilets – and yet, bacteria are still there. And what is also still there is the thrill:

> *it's so enchanting… when then you scratch the soil and see all these potatoes born underneath… like that… it almost seems a miracle!*

Enchantment of seeing life produce further life.

The capacity to self-produce, apart from its ecological implications, is also in line with Valerio's values and especially his craving for freedom and independence from others' determinations. He believes these start from the basics – from the energy that one needs in order to survive:

For him, it is just absurd that taxes on wood stoves exist, while great deforestations are taking place… "there is something that doesn't quite work … and instead, just think about this: if you have a stove and some cash and trees to burn, and a vegetable garden… <u>you are not commanded by anyone</u>. Because you burn as much as you want, you can go shopping, and you can eat potatoes, in case… you live. If you have, instead, gas, wood-chips stove or anything else, <u>commanded</u>, you have the debit card, you need to go to the supermarket… when they switch off the light <u>you are dead</u>."

Having a self-production of food and favouring local exchange economies is therefore a mode of materialising a line of flight from a world in which 'normal' people are *commanded* by 'them' – evil powerful. As such, it is a way of resisting, disrupting and

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[242] The area, in the past, hosted a huge amount of different qualities of this much-loved legume. They have lately been disappearing in favour of standardised, industrial varieties – less expensive and mass-produced. Old people still talk with their eyes aglow about the peculiarly intense flavour of the beans 'of the old days', lamenting their disappearance as a dispossession of taste-richness. There is a recent effort to salvage them as many small projects and cooperatives are being founded in the area.

functioning against a global economy that is ecologically, socially, financially and politically ‘out of control’; largely dictated by the interests of the few.

This is not to say that this transition always implies straightforwardly more sustainable, or politically consistent, life choices. For instance, if it is true that Valerio commendably makes the bread by himself with local flours; it is also true that he started doing that since he found on sale, *half-price*, an electric bread machine (despite having an outside wood oven for pizza and bread). He has not methodically committed to a reduction in purchase, emissions and electricity consumption (we saw this above regarding his use of the car and clothes purchase)[243]. Yet, his peculiar and very singular reterritorialization (on the other side of the lake), affords intense encounters with (un-)nature that continuously put him in flight from appropriative, unsustainable, assemblages.

Let us go back for a minute to the front of his house and take a look at the lake together. His (and ours) being here is, in some sense, the product of many coincidences (not least proximity to the highway[244]). Valerio had some money to invest and an architect friend showed him this plot of land: it was on sale and the idea was to build two houses and then sell them…

> *but in the moment I cut the trees and looked at the landscape I decided to remain here for a while!*

In other words, what was crucial in deciding to come and live here was the intensity of the lake itself – intensity that, by the way, countered the process of reduction of this place to a commodity to sell for profit. As an artist, Valerio is in love with this continuously changing and diffracting landscape that opens in front of his eyes. Even further, the

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[243] It might be his dividing the world into weak and powerful, commanded and commanders, miserable and rich (which we have just seen but that also comes across in §6.2.2), to prevent him from realising how much he is contributing to the perpetuation of the economy and society he is so eager to criticise. This we can see as a ‘paranoid’ view of the world, made of splittings and projections – for instance, of the responsibility for environmental degradation, which tends to fall onto *them*, the all-powerful. But we should be weary that this kind of phenomenon is not merely psychic: it is always-already social, the product of a specific system and (libidinal) economy in which responsibility and political agency are often displaced from individuals to powerful elites under the disguise of democratic processes.

[244] He says he liked this place also because it was close to the highway entrance, so he can easily and quickly move anywhere he needs.

intensity of this place brings him beyond experiencing it as a “landscape” – opposed to the “faciality” of an enclosed self-affirmative identity.

I say: the lake is my palette, the wind is my paint brush – I do nothing.

- as he told me while we were looking at the lake from his house. This is what sublime beauty can do: create zones of proximity where the artist-Man, in a movement of becoming, loses agency, power and control to become-lake, become-wind… and the lake and the wind, in the meantime, have become something else: palettes, brushes, creative elements of a world of enchanted light. No longer will-to-power as affirmation of Self but unproductive rapture in the dynamic potency of nature.

Nothing needs to be done: intensities allow stillness. Stillness allows Life.

6.5. Fifth line of becoming: Becoming-object. Or: that 60-year-old class A fridge

In the meantime, Homica starts to talk to me about the things in the house: <u>the fridge</u>. First of all, he wants me to listen to the "clac" that it produces when opening it – which he likes a lot, and in fact when he was a child he used to play with the one, identical, that his grandma had, for this reason. It was one of his friends who proposed this to him: it still had the guarantee certificate with it so we know it's from 1959! He liked vintage things, even if he would have preferred one of a more rounded shape. But this he found, and this he kept. He explained to me that "the nice thing" about this fridge is that everybody says they consume a lot of energy, but this is not true: he changed the seal (that "goes to hell" after some time), even if it was a bit of a pain; then also the insulation because it was smelly and lastly the electrical circuits, which were made by "a guy, a professional in the field"… anyway the point is that after having done all this he started to measure with the clock for how long it would stay still and for how long it would work, and knowing its consumption rate was 130W/h, he could compare it with a class A fridge (we laugh): "you see, you need to do these things if you wanna understand in what kind of world you live in, right?![245]". And in fact a guy from "Carol", a company that repairs appliances, explained to him that these engines are very good because in the past they used to make engines with a potency of 110 per cent that then worked at 100 whereas now they make engines with a potency of 80 to make them work 100… "so it's clear that the 110 one lasts and the other does not!". In sum, he calculated that the fridge's energy consumption was like that of a class A fridge "measured with a stopwatch"! "So in the '60s they'd hit a fridge that lasts and that saves energy. So what kind of story is it that they come and tell us today… <u>this is what I ask</u>! They sell you class A fridges that last… with a clockwork! They last 10 years and if that's the case it means you've been bloody lucky!" This, instead, is 57-year-old! "it's clear that in this way then people can come and tell you 'eh but then there'd be no work!'[246] – all to be questioned, this thing is super questionable as well because… if working is making and unmaking, well…![247]"

There are territorialised matters (an old fridge that was to end up in the landfill) and territorialised assemblages of enunciation (discourses of modernisation and energy efficiency). Homica enters a zone of proximity with a fridge. A line of flight

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[245] In dialect. His alternation between Italian and dialect does not seem fully purposive, and I would say it is more of a matter of speaking with-in different populations and collectives. Is he voicing here the practical intelligence of those who do not let 'progress' and official science dictate the rules of what 'knowledge' is?

[246] In dialect.

[247] In dialect.

deterritorialises the assemblage. Becoming-experimenter, becoming-object with the object becoming in the meantime something different: a micro-resistance, a stubborn matter that questions a world where *working is making and unmaking*. Ecological concerns are central for this encounter to happen. Approaches like ABC would provide a linear explanation: Homica holds ecological values, therefore he seeks to behave sustainably, therefore he chooses to restore an old fridge. But this is complicated by my own fieldnotes, the writing of which is resonant to the ways I was affected by the scene.

First of all, he wants me to listen to the "clac" that it produces

First of all, there is a sensuously (sensually?) being touched by a sound and a tactile affection. *Clac.* Then there is a line of infancy, becoming-child, repetitive play with a thing, *a fridge*. Love for the fridge that has very little to do with its meaning but much with the affective atmosphere of things past (a grandmother), touch of fingers, noises that become unruly since they have begun to be erased by appliances as a matter of household sound sanitation (modern fridges simply do not *clac*: they are <u>silent</u>). Then there is a friend, and without that friend there would maybe be a modern fridge[248]; the fridge itself (notice how, in the extract in the note below, *it came* – as if it had its own kind of special potency to arrive[249]); an aesthetic sensitivity. <u>Then</u> there is the fact that

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[248] See this extract, which refers to later in the day, when the wife came home and we were preparing dinner:
Homica looks in the fridge for the 'radisee' [dialect name for dandelion, a seasonal specialty in Veneto; Homica had picked them up from the garden earlier], which are instead outside of the window: "ah! I was almost forgetting... <u>our fridge</u>!". This episode prompts him to tell me of when they used to live here not only without a proper kitchen, but also without a fridge! During the winter, they'd put things out of the window and during the summer they'd buy only what they needed, fresh for the day. I ask what it was like, to live without a fridge: "you live the same anyway, basically – in her case, well...!", answers Homica, and laughs. In fact, soon comes his wife's correction: "so let's say that for a bit... okay! Then at a certain point I started... I put a time--- I said 'that's it! If by the 22nd – it was July, I think – a fridge does not arrive I go to SME [local department store] – 'cause he also wanted it of a certain aesthetic quality.... – and I buy it!'" and right then a friend came around who had some relatives that were throwing away the fridge and, knowing about Homica's passion for that kind of objects, he said to go and pick it up. In conclusion, it came right two days before the wife went to buy one! Similar story for the one they have downstairs, which now functions as a cupboard for shoes and garbage bags – "to keep it busy doing something as well, right? poor devil!" [in dialect].

[249] That this is the way in which Homica relates to objects, as lively things (and therefore calling for respect), is also confirmed by the extract above: the second fridge is almost attributed a right to retain some kind of functionality – not to become a simply disposable piece of garbage.

the fridge already existed and was therefore more ecological. It is again misleading, though, to simply turn around the list as if the sensuous qualities came before, were more important. There is no real *first*-and-then: there is the fridge as a bundle, a mesh of lines of desire that draw bodies together. The fridge's presence is an emergence of these co-present lines. Lines that are both signifying (sustainability, reuse and recycle, lasting objects…) and a-signifying (a sound, a touch, a friend, a shape, a grandmother).

The fridge-assemblage is ecological and responds to (indeed, enhances) desires that traverse Homica's body: aesthetic, ethic and relational: joyful. But it is also "intelligent" – becoming-inventor that is part of his process of re-appropriation of (practical) knowledge over the energy exchanges that are part of our everyday lives (*you need to do these things if you wanna understand in what kind of world you live in, right?!*), a way of assembling with matter that emancipates him from given standard 'knowledge'. Instead of relying on 'what they say' about fridges (and 'what they say', as he well knows, is always a power-ridden issue, made of *super questionable* growth and work imperatives; the perverse need to produce and destroy in order to keep a perverse economy going), Homica literally takes in his hands the same standards and measures (the stopwatch) that *they* use – but turn them on their heads. He effectively measures part of our subjection to the realities that economic imperatives construct for us.

In doing so, he does not construct a 'truer' but a different reality – which nonetheless has markedly different effects: a fridge is saved from landfill; it comes into affective relation with the inhabitants of a house (and me, and who knows how many other people) – and not in the sense that it is attributed 'agency' but in the sense it is treated as intense matter with a dignity to ex-sist; energy, metal and oil were saved by not building a new fridge; Homica rejoices each time he opens the fridge because he likes the way it sounds; several multinationals are a little less rich and a little less powerful; a wife is happy about a fridge that a husband is also happy about; the dispose-and-grow economy that is devastating the planet has been cracked in, a little. Repairing the fridge has deterritorialised the rigid segmentarities, the dualisms, that divide working objects and trash, the object-hierarchy that subtends their relation and that is so powerful in generating ever-increasing quantities of waste (see Avallone 2014).

Our earth is a little less fragile[250]

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[250] I am referring to a small card that pops up over the fridge. It says "TERRE FRAGILI" ("FRAGILE EARTHS"). I have no idea what it refers to, as I only saw it in going back to my photos. I could ask, but there would be no point. It just works well like this, (t)here.

We should also notice that this re-appropriation entails a (partial) distancing from objects, pieces of information, socially accepted constructs that mediate between our bodies and our *experience of energy*. Hence, becoming-object in repairing the old fridge is also a spoliation: taking *wrappings* away, making space for the new, *bringing back things to the skin*. Creation of a void. Physical: the space unfilled by a new fridge coming into being. But also bodily, cerebral[251]: space to think more freely, to create[252]. Because ‘sustainability’ needs new inventions. Simultaneously, this spoliation is not a limitation of/on desire but, quite the opposite, it is what keeps it active. Not buying a new fridge meant applying creatively to the one he found, engaging skilfully with its mechanisms. Furthermore, it does not involve a denial of materiality and sensuousness *per se*, but rather its intensification: when Homica chooses old appliances like the fridge, or vacuum cleaners, or a switch… it is also always because they have aesthetic qualities that he cannot find in new ones[253].

Indeed, as much as he is ‘ascetic’ with regards to buying new things, he is baroque in accumulating old ones. As we are walking in a second house he uses as laboratory and storehouse…

We enter the following room: “here, I am super-full of stuff!” he shows me “ballpark” (well, it would be impossible to see everything!): vacuum cleaner, a little old vent that “we use during the summer”, the tennis racket, the tambourines, drawing desk bits[254], bicycle pieces – of course, scales, grinding machine, his son’s old bicycle. “My ruin! And in all this I get a whole lot of things, I accumulate them all – and, by the way, they’re only things that can go among the trash! – but then these things, from the trash have come here! [he laughs: he is showing me the old printers that he and his son are “cannibalising”] ...serious illnesses! Serious illnesses”. I ask him why he likes

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[251] I refrain from calling it a “mental space” as Homica, who is certainly a materialist, once wrote me: *things come across my brain, which indeed I just don’t want to call mind* (personal communication, August 2017).

[252] See §6.1.3, where Alberta talks to me about tidying up as liberating vital space for thought as well as body.

[253] Similarly, if he and the wife cook on the stove it is (also) because food comes out tastier; if he goes by bike it is (also) because he needs to move his body.

[254] This is a small desk Homica is building for the son: it can be used both for studying/drawing and for woodworking and other applied activities. Its original, flexible and adaptable design was ‘invented’ by Homica himself (and, notably, it challenges another well-established binary of modern capitalist societies: manual | intellectual activity).

accumulating so much. "Illnesses, illnesses. But also because things stimulate, stimulate. To me--- I come… this is the room of the thinkery!" He says this while holding on his lap an old lamp and sitting on a small chair. I take a photo of him. Nobody else would go thinking in such a full and small room – it looks like the opposite of a place that allows the brain to breathe! As I show him his photo, he laughs of himself, but happy: "look how scruffy I am[255]*! Aaaw that's fine – it is what it is in the end…!". He explains that the thinkery works like this: "this is the thinkery. So I sometimes take something in my hands, sometimes I take another but l---listen: try and make a tic-tac with this!": he is materially showing how he thinks. He took an old lamp in his hands, which has a switch that moves wonderfully and he makes me try: it's true! It's really "a tactile pleasure", I say. And he: "oooooh well yes! Good God! And unfortunately these things… let's say… I mean…!"*[256] *Then he goes on showing me objects, materials that also make him think.*

From this extract we see that all this matter is, as he says, *potential energy*. Not only in the sense that materials can be reused, but also in the sense that being around objects, connecting with their sensuousness, entering zones of proximity, afford him the joy of a continuous production.

New ideas and objects are put at the service of everyday pleasures and shared enjoyments in his family: it is a proper work for him, especially now that he has been unemployed for some time. This ability for DIY and self-production challenges labour/leisure, production/consumption binaries. And it also makes much sense, as I remarked while we were together, because *he makes the things that otherwise he would need to buy! He confirms: "Right, spot on! You see that… let's say, there's a logic in all this […] I cannot buy beautiful stuff, but in some ways I manage to make it myself!"*. But this is not a matter of surviving unemployment: even when he was employed, he used to *work three-four hours a day* in order to *maintain this whole world going*. What Homica is pursuing is instead the making a different world, emancipated from the cycles of alienated production, consumption and disposal that govern unsustainable everyday life formations in late-capitalist Western societies[257].

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[255] In dialect.

[256] In dialect.

[257] This is well encapsulated by the story about his house's restoration. Someone had pointed out to them a worker who was used to work in eco-housing, but they had calculated that it was more convenient for Homica to leave his job in the factory instead of paying the worker. And so, with the help of a veteran of eco-housing, Homica also became a manual worker.

In all this there is, nonetheless, something that does not work quite well, something that haunts its joy with a sterile sorrow. Many of Homica's productions remain unfinished and of this he suffers[258]. This frustration introduces us to a different dimension of Homica's life investments – which is a certain desire to *give a sense* to his creations by selling them. As he jokingly says:

H: […] I have the fixation with entrepreneurship, so to speak! [we laugh whole-hartedly] Typical!
A: now that's North East!

H: precisely! But this, I tell you, is something… typical of the family! [we keep laughing] Obsession…! So much so for this thing of the import-export business[259]*: I could not even conceive the performance effect in it because it should have been a job, it had to become practical, it had to be inserted in reality.*

The point was that he then could not make them actual because they remained unfinished. In part, because *people really weren't that interested* in the original energy-ideas he wanted to communicate through 'his' objects. But even more significantly *I was not able to sell myself! Not even to a minimum, damn it! A minimum would have been enough… nothing! Bare nothing!* He is a good communicator, but he is *better at communicating the pleasure of doing* rather than having – so that people are mostly pushed to do things for themselves rather than buying them off him! Further, his constant *search for perfection* often turns projects into obsessions rather than entrepreneurial activities. Finally, as he admits, he is good at making one prototype but he is not able to *produce a series*. He loses interest in a problem once he sees that it is solved – he is interested in the *act of creation*, as I call it and he enthusiastically confirms. He is not able to follow customer's requests

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[258] This is, in particular, the case of the bike building project that inspired his pseudonym for this research: Homica. Years ago, Homica fell in love with a bike model called Pedersen – beautiful and very comfortable to ride. Its design is from the late 1800s and it is now produced only in a little factory in Holland. He decided to produce it, by hand, in Lago and sell it. Despite it would be a very expensive bike, some people had already booked one. He went to Holland (by bike) to meet the current producer. He accumulated a number of tubes and other parts for constructing the bicycles. He made one for himself and one for the wife… and *stopped*.

[259] The general idea was to commerce in bikes by literally cycling them from where they were produced to where they would be distributed – and taking something else back in the return trip.

and gets drawn astray by things[260]: the potency of things. All this*, in time, has been a waste of energy without anything coming back in from them*.

This list of 'failures' talks, to me, of lines of desire that are almost constitutively in flight from the striated surfaces of entrepreneurship: producing for selling, standardisation, rationalisation, profit, accumulation. Homica is not *able* to sell himself, to compromise on his *powerful ideas*, to reify what he managed to de-reify (ideas that need to be practical, part of everyday life – not performances to be looked at as spectacle: see Debord 2002), make a commodity out of a belief. But he does not seem to be able to counter-effectuate his 'call' to be different either. It is as if there were a clash of lines that left him suspended: lines of flight vs a line of repetition that keeps folding back onto the '*famiglietta*' with him as a breadwinner entrepreneur[261]. As he says, *I must have some interior blockage that does not allow me to get to the point!*[262] And we might suggest that this happens because in the moment he approximates *the point*, the very shocking and hurtful experience of his father's wreckage immediately sets him into a line of flight.

To understand this, we need to go back to the flooded track…

G: but this eeeehm… the burning issue with business is that… [we take away our shoes] Eeeeh! I mean the fact is that I am always careful to… not to fall in--- I mean for me when I do this stuff, but if I fall into the same mess ["nella stessa polenta"] where my father fell, so to speak, that's not good!
A: yeah you're not hap---
G: yeeeah… No! The second time that someone says to me let's say I make Pedersen – no, I – let's say: "aah you're an entrepreneur… of Pedersen", for me – that's spoiled already![263] *Understand?*

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[260] As we were going around his storehouse, *we enter a room: there is an old drafting machine and some pieces he had built some time ago: like a dovetail of wood pieces that were born for a project of stairs. Then one guy asked him a table, made again of barrel wood. And so he started playing with joints… and a chair had come out! "and the guy had to get home with a chair! But he was happy anyway… I find this quite amusing in some sense… but maybe not that much because that's not really good! It's not really good…!"*
[261] And being the project of the Pedersen the most significant of all, it is a bitter irony that precisely a bike brings him back to his father.
[262] Funnily, if decontextualized, this sentence (at least in Italian) would recall the idea of the incapacity to get to the point of a sexual intercourse.
[263] In dialect.

As we are walking on the flooded track, the rocks are somehow pointed. Homica walks on the side of the track – which is a bit grassier and therefore gentler on the skin. I am enjoying being in the water, and the feet-sensations. Becoming-savage, becoming-child, becoming-rock. We keep talking. He tells me that his grandfather first and his father then would say that they would only work for the benefit of the family and particularly of him as a child – *always this refrain*. And how absurd it was that they would work all day non-stop and wouldn't have time for the family at all. *And then things like this happen, I mean… yeah, no shit!* He switches to dialect. *"fuck you!" I tell, to these guys*. And yet, he feels to be back there, looking for and at the same time fleeing that kind of life ideal. And right as he is telling me that there has been an *extremely strong social pressure* for him to organise his life according to this ideal… he falls in a dip in the ground (invisible in between the grass and the water). We laugh as he comes out well-mudded up to the knee. In that moment, I did not realise how much of a strange coincidence that was. It was just in listening back to the record of the interview that I was brought to realise that, in some ways, Homica keeps falling into holes… and more than muddy, they have the viscous quality of polenta. These prevent him from finding some *structure*, from reterritorialising desire on something productive, something new: sterile "black holes" (Deleuze and Guattari 2014: 167ff.) where desiring movements tend to burn out---------

September 7th, 2017. After one year and a half, and strangely as I am writing this chapter, Homica finally sends me his image of "energy" – well, as he writes me, *just one element/origin of it, which is----------- ashes.*

6.6. Sixth line of becoming: Becoming-plant

> *The wisdom of the plants: even when they have roots, there is always an outside where they form a rhizome with something else—with the wind, an animal, human beings.*
>
> Deleuze and Guattari (2014: 11)

We now enter the fascinating and mysterious realm of plants, to witness new becomings. They may be less conspicuous, have a feminine quality to them, the peculiar character of quietness – and yet an enduring force, typical of plants. Despite their recent revival in scientific literature (e.g. Mancuso 2017), plants are among those things that modern industrialisation has sought to subdue and control for the purposes of feeding animals (human and non-human), medication, production of hi-tech materials and fuels. Thought of as unfeeling, malleable, indifferent, weak… among organic matter, plants remain the most easily exploitable and disposable according to Western hierarchies of value. And yet plants have their own, largely invisible but relentless, potency to do and change things, connect, build collectives, form rhizomes…

6.6.1. Waterfalls, trees, spirit(s)

C: where we were, there… there where there's… 'cause water, where you stopped earlier to take photos because it's so beautiful…
A: yeah?
C: during the winter,
A: yeah
C: when it's winter… you know, it freezes, and then it's full of stalactites. I used to come oft--- oft… even during the winter, dressed up warmly. And I would sit there amidst the ice and I would meditate.
A: and you meditated?
C: yes
A: beautiful!
C: these things I don't tell around very often because, you know, people say "this woman must be some kind of a weirdo!"[264] *and for me it's… I would do it…*
A: [I laugh] no it's so beautiful…!
C: I would do it yes yes I would do it as a practice really, even during the summer I could come here at dawn or in the morning and I wouldn't find anybody around. Sitting close to the water… it's got its own energy, right? Then also communicating with the spirits of the place… I would always ask for their permission, right? to be allowed to stay here and I would thank them… the spirits of the water… I--- just like the shamans do, right? The shamans are so much in contact with nature. I used to do this always, natu--- in a natural way… in part, built up through techniques but also, in part, spontaneously.

During the day of the interview, Costantina and I set off from her house, on foot, to get to the Grotte del Caglieron. The walk is about 45 minutes long, along rural tracks and small, little trafficked, routes. The first idea was to drive to the forest of Cansiglio – a place that, as we shall see, is very significant for Costantina. But it was the beginning of December and, although the day was sunny and relatively warm, she thought the mountains would be less welcoming than the hills around her house. Or maybe it was just too much, too intense. She decided to walk to this beautiful place, which I also knew (as almost everybody in the area does[265]). As we walk through the grottoes, overwhelmed,

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[264] See also §6.2.4.

[265] The beauty of this short stretch of waterfalls and grottoes has always made them quite popular, but they had always remained rather wild, apart from the wooden gangway. Recently, the Council has spotted them as a good means of attracting tourists. The road that comes here has been widened for coaches and also a more spacious parking set up.

she often loses the continuity of the argument, stops saying something to just stare at the water falling, being silent listening to its sound, perceiving the humid and cool air around us, or the smells of rock, moss, sand, water.

As the extract above makes evident, Costantina's relationship to these elements is more complex and rich than that of an average tourist who comes and looks at the site. She is *in contact* with nature, in zones of proximity that set in motion continuous movements of becoming – becoming-water, becoming-ice, becoming-soil… This affective relationality is what allows Costantina to perceive this place as alive, dynamic, and for this very reason having a right to be respected, to be cherished: it is not a place that one can just 'consume'. It calls for humility in front of energies that inhabit the place: active, relational, with wills and potencies to accept – but also resist – human presence. If, in some ways, these potencies are almost anthropomorphic *spirits*, they remain irreducible to human beings, things of a different nature.

This sensitivity is, in great part, the result of lines of desire that thread through her whole life. Costantina traces *this 'spiritual' attitude to nature*, as I call it, back to her infancy. For already *when I was three-month-old I was in the mountains*, in Cansiglio. And then throughout her life as young girl she would live there during vacation periods and weekends.

C: […] my father was a forest ranger[266]*... I mean we'd go around and make sure that Venetians didn't leave any fires lit, or picking up garbage. Because that was his job on Sunday aaaand also my mum whooo would pick raspberries, we'd make jams, or mushrooms… and then we'd eat them. Mmm it was really a spontaneous rapport of respe--- yes, even on their side. And then my mother is Cimbra*[267]*, right? So there also*

A rural house was restored for making a museum, which has not been set up yet – while the old watermill at the end of the walk, that old and ecologic way of using energy, is decaying. As Costantina and I talk about this touristic revival, we both acknowledge the strengths and drawbacks of the endeavour. She excitedly tells me that some time ago she found a video on Facebook, made with a drone, that showed the waterfalls – it was beautiful and will bring more and more people here. But she adds: *yeah but I am even happier to come on a Thursday and there is nobody here.* Taken into the assemblages of growth (valorisation through commodification of the natural environment), Costantina praises the economic contribution that this site might give to the area. And yet, a line of flight is also set in motion by the sheer intense beauty of this place: being here, alone, meditating… becoming-imperceptible.

[266] Like Valerio's father. Significant coincidence, it was through Costantina that Valerio knew about my research and offered to participate.

[267] See Appendix D1 for a few historical notes on the Cimbri – very relevant to our own discussion.

is the whole of her tradition, Cimbri's… visiting relatives, spending time with Cimbri friends, with the community… and anyway… always this living in relation to what's around us in nature.

Key to the development of an ecological attitude of respect for nature, its products and its rhythms is *contact* – having been bodily and affectively immersed in places full of trees, berries, animals, etc.: continuity and participation between her body and other living things. Spending much time in the mountains allowed to build *a rapport, a relationship* with nature.

Interestingly, this contact passes through plants: trees. When she was in Cansiglio, in fact,

she used to spend time on her own, mostly. She would climb trees ("I was like the Baron in the Trees"[268]) and she would play with leaves and willows ("like Mandala as far as I can remember…").

Being among the Cimbri in the Cansiglio forest would set in motion becomings: becoming-tree, becoming-leaf, becoming-willow, becoming-imperceptible… A proximity with nature that is not simply a mimicking of a 'being natural' in the sense of being uncivilised, or animal. Rather, they produced creative expressions of the vital and dynamic intermeshing between human beings and their environment – plays that produced forms. As Costantina recalls her memories, new elements become part of that past reality: a novel's character, Hinduism, Buddhism and their spiritual diagrams…

Hence, apparently 'individual' proximities established while being *alone* in the woods founded an attitude of *respect* for nature. But what is also crucial is a certain way of being there, which is cultural. It might not be by chance, after all, that she is so libidinally drawn to trees – which are very important to Cimbri's economy and society. Furthermore, Costantina spent time in the mountains but not as a tourist. The tourist, epitomised by *the Venetians*[269], is one who comes during the weekend (the alienated free

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[268] The famous protagonist of the eponymous book by Italo Calvino, one of the greatest 1900s Italian writers and intellectuals. Even from the beginning of its Wikipedia page we can infer the relevance of the novel to this story: "a *conte philosophique* and a metaphor for independence, it tells the adventures of a boy who climbs up a tree to spend the rest of his life inhabiting an arboreal kingdom" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Baron_in_the_Trees).

[269] In our area *i veneziani* (people from Venice) are typically referred to as 'strangers' (though they live 50 km away!) unfamiliar with the rural environment.

time of consumption and 'leisure') for a picnic and consumes the forest as recreational ground, is out-of-synch with its self-restorative ecosystem (*garbage*, *lit fires*). On the contrary, the forest ranger and even more the Cimbri, this minor population, take care that this ecosystem remains alive, healthy, can digest its own productivity. Cimbri are here the image of a human society that is an integral and dynamic part of the mountain, its woods and products (mushrooms, berries) – a relationality that, significantly, they also enact among themselves as human beings: *community* is both human and non-human, continuously reproduced. Even when she was not in Cansiglio, she used to live in a small village, which *it's not like living in a city*. She had friends, schoolmates and *we'd always be outside… if there was the occasion, they would go and nick cherries, they used to live outdoor.*

This infancy returns today as lines of desire – the joy of community, frugality, sensuousness and simplicity. The fascination for things past sometimes surges as a sort of melancholy, sometimes as the search for a novel and creative re-actualisation of that liveliness. This is also evident as she brings me, during our interview, to a field where the inhabitants of the village have set up a nativity scene, a "presepe" as we call it. The statues are full-scale and scattered across the field, in groups: some are at work (carrying hay, knitting), others are sitting in small sheds that reproduce old houses and cellars… The set-up is meant to reproduce and explain life as it would have been more or less 60-70 years ago in these rural areas – *things that no longer exist*, disappeared all too quickly as an effect of industrial 'progress'. We pause there for some time, walking and looking around. Costantina lets her beloved dog, Lilly, to run around happy. She likes to be here, she likes the way people from the village *of their own will* and *with much passion* have built all this by themselves. The intensity that this place holds talks about the ways her life is continuously traversed by the search for a sense of spiritual-energetic, productive, interconnectedness that takes place <u>through</u> matter, not despite it. A presepe, after all, is a spiritual endeavour. It also contains the Panevin[270] – maybe one of the rituals that most deeply testifies to the correspondence between physical, visible and tangible, energy and spirituality (and to the continuous fertilisation of Christian spirituality by pagan traditions).

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[270] The Panevin is a big pile of willows and other pieces of wood (again, plants and trees) that is lit up on January 6th, day of the Epiphany. The puppet of an old woman is put on top of it – standing for bad luck and evil. The Panevin has mostly to do with work in the fields and propitiating good and abundant productions, but it also has the function of eliminating the unpleasant things of the year past.

C: yes burning old things, indeed because other arrive… you see, things get to the end of the year aaaand… you burn them to start with new things that… it's a ritual and like all rituals it has its own…
A: they have their own function in… probably in the overall scheme of things
C: well I believe so. Even a function…   Lillyyy, Lillyyy! Come here! Come, come here. Lillyy!! Too funny, ah, running around… come here!

This Pagan-Christian fire makes Costantina closer to what her experience as woman, human embodied being, is. And as we talk about energy, as we are in-between the enactment of physical, spiritual, human, cultural forces that strive to give Life to life, the dog rejoices and we with her: women-becoming-animal-becoming-plants.

Simultaneously, we should not be deceived: Costantina is not stuck in the fixation on a past that maybe has never existed. She is not against technology, modern appliances, cultural contamination, etc. – typical of modern globalised economies. Quite the contrary. For instance, she seems excited by the eco-innovations that she learns about via the internet and shows me, such as an airport in India that has been designed to be fully dependent on solar energy. What she rather seems to be carrying on, reactualising, is the enchanted intensity of an affective and relational being-in-the-world that is also more balanced and less destructive to ecosystems[271].

Thanks to the intensity of her relationships with matter, Costantina is able to live a life of intensities without the need of fancy commodities or conspicuous material apparatuses. It is in small, sober and simple things that she finds the greatest pleasure and enjoyment. This I can see in her intensely sensuous way of using her body, her hands, her touch. Our walking interview is itself a testimony of this – her eyes blinking at the beauty of the waterfalls and her body at ease among the humid rocks, on the sand, immersed in the sound of water. This way of experiencing energy as a physical but also spiritual force immanent in things[272] is such that a little candle, the simple food cooked for a Sunday lunch with her son, a pair of small earrings… these encounters all are charged with an affective intensity of touch, smell, sight, etc. that makes them big-enough to fill life of enchantment.

It might be no chance that well before discourses of "sustainability" became the common currency they are today, this ecological attitude was very much ingrained in Costantina's daily assemblages. Hence, when I ask her whether her unemployment coinciding with the economic crisis has implied a different relationship to consumption, Costantina replies:

C: I'm trying to think to what I used to do before. In the sense that when I was living in Verona, I would cycle to work. And I did not have any [financial] problem in using the car. So I'm not sure I am just the right person to ask! [we laugh]
A: no actually…
C: I would go by bike and I would go shopping with my backpack…
A: yeah yeah, no but I am really interested in this point of view as well

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[271] A similar longing is also expressed by Chiara, though in more specific and at the same time more ecologically problematic (?) terms: *I am attracted by the idea – okay – primitive, la la la. Buuuut eeehm as I was saying earlier: not a total absence of technology maybe. But something that integrates* <u>*better*</u> *and that is such that yeah the primitive aspect of an environment prevails. […] I imagine a "greener" technology, maybe. Where there are electric cars, buildings that maybe do not devastate nature, but it's the other way round, maybe: the houses integrated into the buildings--- nooope in nature maybe.*

[272] One of her images of energy was a small assemblage of stones, an Orgone, a small picture abstractly portraying an angel… different kinds of energy (material, psychic, spiritual) to represent what is her *personal experience* of it.

C: mmm yes but then I would also use the car, or the train, or I would also travel… but let's say that many things I would do anyway like that as… as a matter of good sense. Of... having the idea of... doing something normal also. Normal not… of not doing the excess. Not being always completely to one side, or completely to the other.
A: I mean so you… you basically have always probably been… you have always had such an attitude and so you did not need to change it
C: yeah maybe even before… I wouldn't cook and then enjoy throwing away things aaaand to my son I would always say you must eat whatever's in the dish but not because it is ethically… or "polically correct" [sic] or whatever to eat and not waste. You do not waste
A: it's better like that
C: you don't do that, you don't waste, it's better not to waste. Then sometimes it can happen, you make some mistake in cooking and…
A: you throw away

From this extract we see that affective relationality with things foregrounds a respect that is not constructed as a moral or ethical commitment: it is spontaneous and effortless. It does not involve self-denial and sacrifice and instead meets active lines of desire. This is particularly evident in her rejection of waste: it is an almost unconscious, a-significant but intense and strong, call *not to waste* that moves her food assemblages.

Yet, we also start noticing that this spontaneity is partially problematic because it does not question 'normality' as such, does not investigate the socially constructed nature of the *normal* middle way. Hence, it does not create a space of radical critique around/about those assemblages of desire that have been territorialised by wider socio-economic and cultural flows. Mobility involving the consumption of non-sustainable forms of energy features (again!) among most accepted and almost un-discussable practices. This has an effect on everyday uses of energy, for instance a rather intense use of the car to move between Osigo, Vittorio Veneto, Conegliano and sometimes Treviso[273]. Surely, material, institutional and geographical arrangements contribute to this relatively intense use of the car. Costantina lives in a small and relatively under-

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[273] For instance, during our day together, we drove first from Osigo to Anzano for a judo class in which she helped the teacher with children, one of whom we stopped to pick up along the route. Then we climbed the hills again and after a few hours we drove back to Vittorio Veneto for her judo class. After that, we went to the bar together to eat something and then she went back home again. This makes for an overall distance of about 25 kilometres.

served village, which makes it quite difficult to rely solely on public transport; furthermore, the road to go back and forth from the main towns is very hilly and therefore challenging to cycle. But also and foremost, desires and correlative assemblages of 'good life' intervene in the practice of driving: the willingness to attend judo classes, for which mobility becomes necessary; the *normality* of moving daily to the distances that car and other means of transport afford; the concentration of social activities in city centres; the increasing lack of social life in villages; etc.

Even more significant in this sense is flying. Costantina is very much pulled towards the idea of travelling to different parts of the world – she went to India, Perù and many European countries; she has also worked as a land hostess in a German airport; she dreams to go to Japan (especially now that she practices Judo and is a Master of Reiki). During our day together, I could see her eyes widening as she asked me about my past trips, where I went, what those places looked like. One of her images of ideal life would be to spend different parts of the year in different parts of the globe. Her unemployment and the crisis generally contribute to keep in check travel-related energy consumption because lack of money does not allow her to travel as much as she would like. But these lines of desire have not been deterritorialised despite her being aware of the adverse ecological effects of flying.

I ask her whether she does not experience a conflict in this respect. Her answer is interesting and worth quoting at length:

C: well I experience it anyway, you know? I experience it every day.
A: mh, you experience it.
C: yes. Because in any case I go shopping. And when I go to the grocery store to buy some cherry tomatoes and I think they are maybe from Puglia, and that maybe they've been picked by foreigners or… who have lived, who live, in unacceptable conditions, exploited like slaves… I am not happy. To the point that in certain periods I don't even buy tomatoes[274]*.*
A: eh
C: but I do not solve the issue – I know I do not solve it. You are asking me a question that is <u>about me</u>, personal, and I reply: yes, I think about this more or less every day

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[274] I believe it very significant that, while we are talking about environmental issues and contradictions, Costantina tries to articulate for me her experience of ethical conflict through an example that has to do with human exploitation: this sensitises us to the fact that, for her, there is affinity in kind between ecological and social violence (see §4.3, 4.4).

and it does not look like a good thing. It is not good what I see… ehm, human beings who <u>*exploit*</u> *other human beings it looks like misers fighting against misers, to me… I mean it's not just that it looks like that--- it is!*

We see Costantina taken into a conflicting position, one in which she wishes the world to be *good*[275]. Nonetheless, she feels that its complexity is such that much of it is out of control: violence enters her body via the food she puts on her table and she is unable to control this because she is separated from the bases of her own conditions of existence by a globalised market economy. The bad encounters the latter produces make her ignorant and unhappy, i.e. sorrowful. The response is, in part, withdrawal: not to buy the tomatoes. Yet, the violence and destructiveness of the system is so endemic and ingrained that a feeling of powerlessness and choicelessness sets in (Fisher 2009). What happens if she avoids flying? *I go on holiday with a bike and I am ecological.* <u>*But*</u>*… am I ecological? Someone has surely produced this bike they have probably made it in India, the tube, the wheel!* In turn, this <u>dis</u>belief in the possibility of change[276] produces the continuation of unsustainable practices. Lines of flight, instead of being accelerated, are annihilated: difference becomes impossible. Assemblages innervated by *badness* generate repetition and the sense of a lack of efficacy fuels acceptance to be carried along lines of anti-ecological desire. *What do I do – do I live, do I not live…? I do my best*, she says, *I recycle…*

…but also, if I need to travel weeeell yeah I <u>*do*</u> *travel!*[277]

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[275] The Italian word is "*bello*", which literally translates as "*beautiful*". Differently from English, this aesthetic attribute can also function to denote the ethical/moral aspects of something.

[276] It is remarkable that the only way she can envision a degree of social efficacy is by being *very very well-off*: *let's say if I had an industry I would do what Luxottica is doing, which I read some articles about… in the mountains. I mean I'd open an enterprise and would try and give the best working conditions possible ehm to whoever is working there.* This points us to the power of capitalist imaginaries to shape hope and agency; but it also suggests that we are embedded in a one-dimensional (systemic) belief that it is possible to solve problems produced by this type of economy by having more of the same as against by socio-political struggle (see Leonardi 2018: 20).

[277] There is a paranoid aspect to this subject position, similar to what we have seen at work for Valerio: the attribution of responsibility to an-other subject, deemed all-powerful, which obscures the extent to which we take part in the reproduction of given assemblages and therefore reproduces hierarchies of subjection (see §6.2.2, §6.4). Costantina can continue to believe any of her actions is irrelevant because she holds that *we live in a world where there are…* <u>*people who command, who decide*</u> – and therefore that any struggle by those who do not will be structurally defeated. Yet again, this is not

Ecological desires therefore find a space within everyday life assemblages only in as far as they do not interfere with other, unsustainable but well territorialised lines, from which she does not seek to withdraw. True, while we talk, there is a line of flight from this: Costantina admits that if we had *the willingness, a real real real willingness*; if we decided *that we no longer like it, that really we no longer want it* – well then *surely if everybody… it will no longer be like this.* Yet, this momentary faith in the world, to precipitate events, is soon brought back to the space of dis-belief: *I don't believe there is*, this willingness. A different world remains an unactualised virtuality[278]. Partly because of this, living through the crisis does not produce any creative opening to new realities, new desires, new lines of assembly. Having no money implies a life of imposed sacrifice and self-limitation. Lack of money prevents Costantina from travelling by plane and other forms of relatively energy-intensive consumption (such as buying new clothes or jewels, going to the cinema or out for a meal, etc.) but this just makes her fall in a black hole of sorrow and solitude: she cannot afford social intercourse because she has no money to go out or invite people at her house, travel to visit her distant friends, purchase a small treat for herself or the son.

The sorrowful character of her unemployment is intensified by other energetic changes – seasonal, planetary and bodily. When I meet Costantina it is December: winter, cold, no much sunlight, the end of the year approximating… difficult experiences come back, *she is drawn to thinking to the saddest periods of her life*, she suddenly *starts crying*. There is also the period of menopause that she is strongly experiencing as a bodily and spiritual change; her son growing adolescent and slowly becoming more independent. As I report in my fieldnotes, she has recently *lost the will to do many things: she gave up her vegetable garden, she no longer goes walking, she has almost given up her yoga practice*

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to be understood as an individually psychological problem to be cured. It is systemic: it has to do with very real unequal power distribution and assemblages that are, to a large extent, both materially and libidinally outside of individual choice. This is evident in her saying "*se devo viaggiare*" – *if I need to, if I must, travel*. Despite we are talking about holiday travels (and not 'imposed' travels related to job, or migration) she does not say *if I want*. She is pushed, or pulled, to that – almost irresistibly.

[278] Interestingly, what intervenes to reconcile desire for equity and sustainability and molar neoliberal assemblages is a depoliticised and disempowering faith in progress, technological fixes, Promethean creativity with a certain accelerationist twist (see Pellizzoni 2015: esp. 125; 225-6). As Costantina resigns to the fact that *there is not at all a… an ideal solution of non-pollution, of... of... of a world that, that cures itself--- that returns healthy because it gets better*, the only possibility envisaged is that we *go ahead towards technology* and use sustainable energy *sources*: *if we use intelligence then maybe we could do like that!*

even if she continues to meditate, she cooks less – her will is fading away more and more. She used to go and pick chestnuts, and now she buys them. She's fed up to do things alone.

During our day together we did not do much, as if she had no planned activity nor the willingness to open to the outside – a breath of fresh air. She did the washing up and talked to me, put the water on the hob for an organic chilli infusion. Waited for the judo class to come in the afternoon… A lack of productivity that is mostly sterile, *closed off.* In the moment she gives up desiring (*her will is fading away more and more*), she also gives up producing those molecular and minor things that were affectively intense and irreducible to the molar assemblages of a market economy: the vegetable garden and the wood (doing and picking up: hands, feet, soils, ability, flowers, insects, moistures, smells, legs, arms, wicker baskets) are supplanted by buying in grocery shops (industries, chemicals, tractors, agents, vans, highways, lights, refrigerators, taxes, money, cars, plastic) ----- spaces deserted by joy are filled by the market.

And yet…

One thing, as a matter of fact, was there for us to do. Costantina lives in a 1960s detached house, with big rooms, high ceilings and big poorly insulated windows. It is her parents' house and she moved here after their death because she had no money to buy or rent another one. It was born out of, and for, affluence and affordable energy. Now, it is too expensive to warm up using the gas boiler. So she bought a small, but very efficient, wood stove in an antiques market for 150 euro to put in the living room, which is in turn connected to the kitchen. This is the space that she and the son inhabit for most of the winter. They have cut down on heating expenses and the space is very warm, comfortable, homely. The stove has become a point of attraction. Close to it the dog lies, the son and his friends sit and play videogames, Costantina listens to the radio, warms up the bread, cooks chestnuts, has lunch, watches films...

The stove requires energy and work. The wood comes right and ready from Tuscany[279] but Costantina has to cut part of it down in little pieces for lighting up the

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[279] *The official seller is from Osigo, a guy whose surname is Azzalini, Cimbro as well, who gives her the wood. I took it for granted that a Cimbro just a few kilometres away from Cansiglio forest would sell wood from Cansiglio, but that's not the case. The wood comes from Tuscany because people there are more skilled in stocking and drying it. It is good quality indeed. She used to buy it from an old man in Fais [local mountain] and she was "happy" about that because it was local. But then the man died and she had to adapt.* We see that Costantina's wood vicissitudes are part wider changes in the area's (energy) economy. As the older people die, less and less bother to produce and sell fire wood – for there is little chance of profit. Hence, the energy autonomy of the area diminishes.

fire[280]. This was our commitment for the day, which was postponed from the morning to the evening, when we were back from the children's judo class.

We get home (it's 6 pm approximately), and Costantina finds the house a little cool. I ask her: is it too late to cut the wood? No, there's a light downstairs. So we decide to go and get the job done. Costantina picks up a pair of gloves for protecting her hands, and we go downstairs. [...] Costantina chooses with care big square pieces from an old pile, a little less ordered than the other. They are very dry, she explains, and so if you cut them down in small pieces, they light by themselves. The base is small and it is too short for cutting the wood, so the whole process is more effortful. With the hatchet, she hits quite hard in the middle of the piece of wood, which stands vertical, and then she cuts it completely with successive hits. If the pieces that result are still too big, she repeats the operation. [...] She learnt how to do this by herself while she was in Tuscany and she was living in the countryside – there, she used to do almost everything in the house. She likes this art of doing by yourself "that if you feel cold in the house you can go and cut some wood". She likes to be an independent woman. I am fascinated.[281]

Homica has experienced something similar. *He also used to go to Cansiglio but now it's more and more difficult: you find more from Tuscany because probably they have less steep hills and so they manage to use more machinery. It is of better quality as well because in time they have developed this aspect more. In fact, when he needed some beams for the house he brought them from there.* He would like to make it for himself, but he has been unsuccessful in buying any piece of forest.

[280] She also has to pile it. A social activity: it involves connections between people, know-hows and the local history of rural living and ecosystemic interaction. *Last Sunday Sebastiano [her son] and a friend helped her to sort out the whole work (three hours, three people) and, Costantina tells me, this friend is so skilled and precise because he has learnt from the father – to the point that he corrected her on how to do it!* The cousin living on the other side of the street also contributed by lending her a push cart for the job.

[281] I was reminded of when my father used to say that I lacked contact with (things of) the soil. So I gave it a try. *But I feel blocked, as if I was not able to do anything, even a bit ridicule compared to her. Yet, despite my difficulties, I manage it. It's quite incredible how much heat you generate in your body by doing these jobs. It's a good exercise and I realise I increasingly feel the need and will to learn how to do these things. I explain to her how much unable I feel, and that since I was a child I was very bad with manual works and getting contact with the land: "probably you have never needed to and so you have never committed yourself to learning...". A matter of family and the way we are educated; she seems to be suggesting, quite rightly, that because those kinds of activities were not believed to be of great value, nobody has ever pushed me to do them. I tell her of my father and his piece of forest, that I would like to go there: "go! I'm sure it'd be a great satisfaction for him...!".* Pushed by this event, I did go with my father in the forest to cut wood (with quite disastrous results, but a great deal of fun!). And although he kind

As 'we' carry out this activity, Costantina skilfully assembles to these (once) trees. Cutting wood requires physical and cognitive coordination, strength, patience. There is a peculiar ability in this that comes from the establishment of an affective proximity with the pieces of wood: becoming-plant, again. In some sense, this becoming-plant is characterised by the sheer rich simplicity of trees, a fluid binding with natural elements that brings human beings closer to the pre-cultural affectivity of plants. At the same time, nonetheless, social determinations and affordances are present throughout and shape these same affects of wood cutting. There is the wood – grown, cut, shipped, sold, purchased, piled. But there is also a woman, whose biographical trajectory of moving to the countryside and learning to make-do opens new, minor and for this reason strongly libidinally charged, ways of *being independent*. It is a woman's independence, as against that of a (labouring) Man. A becoming-minor that is politically emancipatory and ecologically sound: it embraces the reproductive domestic sphere (*she used to do almost everything in the house*) not as a space of subjection but one in which autonomy is (only apparently paradoxically) based on inter-dependence with, and respect for, non-human nature (see Salleh 2017).

Connecting back wood-cutting to 'its' stove-assemblage, we might argue that the latter somehow resists those sorrowful assemblages of global economy and obscure governance that Costantina perceives to dominate our present without escape. Against that 'world out of control', a stove with the wood and the skills to manage it affords a relative autonomy and independence, a sense of potency in having one's livelihood (quite literally) in one's hands[282]. This relationship to the wood signals an overlap between ecology and her flight (always partial, provisional, even momentary) from the dependency on far-away actors and resources to which the global capitalist economy seems to submit her.

This point returns as Costantina tells me about her decennial fascination with eco-housing. Although always-already traversed by imaginaries and objects of late capitalist economy (research, invention, development, robots, drones, solar panels, electric cars,

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of teased me by saying that now I must "be sustainable", I think he was happy to see that (quite paradoxically) academia had brought me 'back to the soil'.

[282] This is also what Valerio argues – see §6.4. Admittedly, this stove-assemblage involves a commodified market exchange: the wood being sold and bought. Yet, this is relatively local and independent compared to oil, gas and electricity from the grid. Wood production and exchange can also be more easily fitted within an economy of regional self-sufficiency and direct, convivial, exchange compared to the far more complex (because effortful to extract, transport and stock) energy sources just mentioned.

use of so-called renewables…), Costantina's *ideal house* is made of natural elements, glass and wood (again, plants). She likes the fact that you can have grass on the roof, insulations; you can recycle rain water, use geothermal or solar energy… What she finds particularly fascinating is not only that eco-housing would produce *less pollution*. It is also about the simple idea of having a house that self-produces: again, an autonomy that is not enacted despite natural elements but with them. Its qualities are gentleness and respect; autonomy and control over one's livelihood – like with wood heating. But, remarkably, she adds:

I don't know to what extent this is a dream, or a desire, right?, of... beauty and also of respect for nature

Respect is linked not so much to a disembodied (rational) morality, but to *beauty*: the almost ineffable aesthetic-affective pleasure of being part of natural cycles[283].

This sense of autonomy and balance Costantina seeks to teach to her son. This is her creative, productive and positive ecological project. In this, she feels to have that degree of control that makes her efforts to 'do her bit' not vain, but meaningful. She continues the exchange on the tomatoes above:

C: mmmm this is what I think but I don't have a solution. The concrete solution… is… well for example, in my own little way I have helped my son… […] that was the reason I was talking to you about my values, I helped him to grow up without many needs.
A: aah! Eh, this is interesting
C: [she laughs] this was, I thought, fundamental because if one does not have many many needs one doesn't have to continuously satisfy them, otherwise he suffers. If one is happy with little, one is happy with little.

She has *purposefully* cultivated with her son a 'frugal' *mode* of relating to things. She recounts, for instance, of the ways in which she would find him completely uninterested in consumption objects. Or that she would make efforts to say *no*, sometimes, when he

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[283] Similarly, for Homica organic food is a matter of *elegance*, again an aesthetic category: *"indeed, I am not a health fanatic. We use organic food much, since many years. But because... I think it is a matter of elegan--- for the whole issue of production, of everything... I am not a health fanatic! I'm not interested in that".*

asked for a certain toy – irrespectively of her financial capacities to buy it. These practices have positive ecological implications, that allow Costantina to concretise her *values*. But remarkably, this 'ecological' project is mainly guided by concerns over what is a good life and how to accomplish it. The good life is, in turn, defined in terms of affective/aesthetic experience (suffering or being happy), not of abstract moral duties.

In turn, this kind of education is based on, and requires, not so much the inculcation of abstract 'values', but rather their texturing with an affective intensity that is sensuous, libidinal, spiritual. In a society that continuously pushes us to purchase things, that one might be successful in instilling sobriety…

C: […] depends on what kind of mode you have established with your child to give him joy and love. This comes from a work that you've made on yourself. If your child is super-happy because you hug him, you tell him "I love you so much, Seba!!! So so much…! Come on, let's go playing!" I don't think then he'd be just like "oh God without that toy-car, without that small new toy I cannot live". Yeah. I mean, you compensate differently. […] [pause during which you can hear, loud, the sound of the waterfall: maybe we are looking at it and reflecting] And then ask me if I've been a good mother – I don't know.
A: well he looks like a great result to me! So look I'd be inclined to say yes. [we laugh]
C: yes I gave him much love but I had to sacrifice work, because with the time… if you want to give time to your child you need to sacrifice work. You need to dedicate time – write this: time. Young children need time. And love.

Much energy is being invested into a happy son – not in his success but in helping him to create affectively rich assemblages, even if not materially opulent, that are both creative and not enslaved to a consumerist (frustrated, sorrowful) drive to appropriation.

Going back to our emplacement along the torrent, Costantina stops and starts looking for something on the rocky side, covered with grass and plants. She spends minutes physically attached to, or touching, the grass, moving rapidly. She is looking for a hole, a *small grotto*, in there, and does it with her full body – *I am a savage*, she says: becoming-primitive. This is something she used to do with her son, when he was young: making him put his hand inside and experience the humid and viscous qualities of the wet and *smooth clay* it contained. In entertaining her child with these discoveries, she put a productive *creativity* to the service of a withdrawal from market consumerist logics. *And I could spend half an hour like that, right? And making him feel and… and developing* *the senses, right? The five senses… So I would make up these little plays, I would invent things, maybe I would do something and then transform it for him in a… in an adventure.*[284]

Costantina the woman, the primitive, the Natural, the bodily (the grotto as a womb?), the dirty, the poor… the minor. On this watery track with a son, she is in flight from civilised, masculine and disembodied ways of mastering elements. She puts limits to material acquisitiveness; but these limits spur desiring creativity and produce joyful, relational assemblages. Life is made enchanted, potencies of what her son's body can do and perceive are sharpened, excitement is in the simple contact with a magical hole. As we enter the little grotto with our hands ourselves, the intensity of fingers and plants and moss and mud touching already sets us into a becoming that is productive and yet does not produce any-thing: becoming-plant, becoming-element… becoming-imperceptible ----- the imperceptible spirit of a waterfall.

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[284] I am, by the way, again reminded of my infancy – when my father would bring me to the woods looking for *moss* (for the 'presepe') and *chestnuts*… things Costantina also used to do with her son. Becoming-child.

6.6.2. Losing oneself while looking at a flower

I left Homica somewhat stuck. But he always laughs (and makes me laugh) a lot; he *moves vigorously around the room*; he never stops being alive, *quivering*, excited, creative. In this, he does not hide a sort of fascination for our society, which affords a continuous increase in stimuli and potencies. He explains this to me during the evening, at home, while his son and his wife are at the church for her chorus rehearsal. Homica is washing the dishes – by hand: he does not have a dishwasher. Our society is *super-excited*, always new things happening, being invented, being done. Climbing, an activity he likes, is a case in point:

Up to a certain point the maximum grade recognised for human capacities was 6. Then other people came and went beyond, even to 8 (Messner), but the others would not recognise this because – incredible – it was impossible! Recently, instead, there has been an opening in this sense: to him, this is surely related to technology, but also and above all to the fact that "the human mind opened up. And it's been nice for me to observe this [...] human beings have started to climb to levels of difficulty that before they mentally could not conceive" [...] In all sectors there has been an expansion of human capacities "sky-high", in just a few years. And this he likes from a certain point of view: "it's nice as an express---"

…an expression: a becoming-other of humanity. In this, Homica reminds Onurbio: dynamic, inventor, in search of novel excitements. He enjoys the 'acceleration' that this society affords, its widening of human capacities – what can a body do? More. What was only virtual becoming actual.

As he is talking to me about the excitement of unforeseen potencies he tells me about his fascination for a US blogger, Casey Neistat, whom he follows on the internet[285]. He is quite the opposite of his ideals – intercontinental flights, big cars, electrical long-boards… but what he likes about this young man is the *incredible ingenuity* with which he does these things, the fact that he lives to the fullest intensity all the achievements of our society. Simultaneously, Homica is very aware that *civilisation displaces its own costs in time and space*, and of the *disastrous consequences* of our civilisation's achievements. So he experiences *a double vision*, a *dilemma*: on the one hand, *that, if you*

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[285] He rejected the internet for a long time, but he now likes to dwell in it because it allows him to witness precisely these processes of expanding potencies.

will, of the kind 'let's try not to destroy ourselves'[286] and, on the other, the fact that *we cannot avoid being fascinated*. He admits that *it's a definitely strange, contorted charm. I'm not saying: 'okay let's enjoy it without any limit and do as much as we can'!* But this poses us the issue: are we not in front of a fascination for the destructive and sorrowful force of an acceleration that, instead of being joyful and life-affirmative, continuously reproduces itself while disposing of the whole world? And is Homica, with his 'limitations', not denying himself this enjoyment out of moral-ethical commitments – only to supplant it with voyeuristic fruition? Are we not witnessing, once again, a libidinally magnetic force of desiring lines that keep coming back to what already exists?

I believe things are more nuanced and possibly very different. We have seen (with other participants) that the complexity of today's everyday energy assemblages produces disbelief and resignation to 'doing one's bit'; in other cases, complexity is reduced to one-way problems (and solutions); at some other times it passes unnoticed. Only in Homica's case assemblages openly and forcefully strive towards ecological sustainability while simultaneously recognising the tentativeness of the project, its contradictions but also the conflicting desires that lay at its heart. He accepts the challenge, "stays with the trouble": *he has never suffered defeats because he has always lived them as something that could bring him beyond, that would give him new stimuli*. But how is this belief in a renewed ecology of everyday life possible, especially in the face of the recognition of the *excitement* that our society affords? I am drawn to say once again that it is a matter of libidinal intensity.

For while he recognises the *charm* of our society's conspicuousness, he is also drawn to say that… *this is a lure. The typical lure. In the most banal way possible. They give you a lure and the lure fascinates you*[287]. But, importantly, the hyper-excitement that *lures* afford

> *also involves the loss of some sensitivities, interior empty spaces, I think, that are then filled up like that, in a certain sense, I mean. Because maybe you have… it's more*

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[286] In dialect.

[287] There is an interesting play of words that goes completely amiss in translation. The Italian word Homica uses when talking about *lures* is "*specchietto*" (literally: little mirror). This refers to a phrase – "specchietto per le allodole" – which we use to indicate a lure. Later in the interview, he remarks that our *specchietto* is now *a hyper-high-definition video*; this cannot but call to my mind the common practice of taking 'selfies' with our hi-tech smartphones.

difficult that you you[288] *lose yourself looking at a flower and things like that. I remember when I was a kid you used to lose yourself looking at a little flower!*

In this becoming-flower, becoming-plant, Homica experiences those same apparently potentiating hi-tech, unsustainable, gadgets as sterile lures that create and fill *voids* while simultaneously diminishing what a body can do, its capacity of becoming-plant as openness to an enchanted becoming-with the world in little, but affectively immense, zones of proximity. What diminishes is a sensitivity, a potency.

At the conjuncture of ecological degradation, economic decline, increasing socio-political hold over people's everyday lives and desires… putting a limit to *wrappings* and *lures* is the way Homica finds to regain this capacity to affect and be affected; *little things* come to be more able than energy intensive ones to produce lively excitements. This is inseparable from a forceful becoming-imperceptible: Homica loses him-Self while looking at a flower. In becoming-flower, he no longer needs all those assemblages that support acceptable identities in modern society (recall the ideal of the *famiglietta* as one that is in love with consumption, material production of new objects and disposal of old ones). And this has ecologically positive implications because it pushes life to be content with what is instead of needing to produce and dispose of ever-new (energy-intensive) objects and experiences. *Being a little strange*, *rebel* against being aligned to *where I am supposed to be*. Self-loss to open to new and unforeseen, imperceptible and fluid, assemblages. Like his bike trips: *they had no certainties: "it was all a becoming" in which he would find things and lose what he did not need.*

This libidinal intensity of becoming-imperceptible is the force of the belief that innervates Homica's everyday life assemblages despite the contrasting lines of desire that sometimes end up in sterile black holes. This is what allows him to recognise the utter un-certainty of any life-ideal, practice, value… and "counter-effectuate" 'his' call to a more ecological livelihood. Such belief articulates in everyday practices, micropolitics that still seek to pursue ideals of a different life, society, ecology. Among these is (as with Costantina) the son's education, to which Homica dedicates much time and energy. He tries to convey to him *independence*, practical intelligence, high affective charge of small things. Like walking on the flooded track on the way back to school, or smoothing out a piece of colourful wood found in the forest…

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[288] Some words in dialect start to creep in and the last sentence is all uttered in dialect.

And so his son, half in dialect and half in Italian, wants to show me how beautiful the colour of this Ausage wood is: the other day, while they were down by the lake, a teacher from the art school came by and told them that they had cut down a lot of it in the woods around Saint Augusta's sanctuary; so the other day, he […] went there to get some. He explains to me that the beautiful thing about that wood is the front vein, but at the moment what they're doing is just "getting to know the material". […] It's shiny but it's been smoothened using sandpaper only – "not even a drop of oil!", explains his son in dialect.

Hence here, around this piece of wood in his laboratory – the sensuous smoothness and lively colour of a bit of fibrous matter – Homica is managing to produce something creative and vital that escapes black holes: it is a (political and creative) collective, made of children, fathers, teachers, instruments, women, woods, strange sociologists, revolutionaries of the old days, books, know-how, lakes, flowers… that lay the ground for possible new, more vital, ecologies-economies (of desire) to materialise:

becoming-plant.

6.6.3. Finding oneself by missing a husband, or: Building trans-human collectives

Leaving Homica, in March, we move in time but not much in space for our mid-August meeting with Laura[289]. She works in a little grocery shop. This was established, two years ago, out of the will of the associates of a local cooperative that produces cheese (for more details on the cooperative see Appendix D2). The shop is situated in the same building where the dairy production and shop are, at the outskirts of a little rural village. Before coming here I met the whole family at home. Laura involved me in the process of waking up the children and getting them up from bed; we had a coffee, they ate some breakfast. Then she drove them to the grandparents (her parents-in-law) and went to work. After a while, I was there as well.

When I arrive, everything is calm at the dairy. The building is red in the bottom part; in the middle, the name of the cooperative is written in big black letters. Above, some murals depict the life and work of local cheese producers – the atmosphere being between an idealised idyllic past and the present of rural villages. It is just off the street and in front of it there is a big parking space. I know it very well because I passed by it so many times since I was a child. It reminds me of my infancy[290] but at the same time it reminds me of how things change without us noticing it. [...] The shop that Laura runs with so much passion is at the far-right end, close to the dairy shop's entrance. There is a door and upon it a colourful countertop with a panoply of fruits and vegs depicted on it, and a writing saying "Roba de casa nostra"[291]. I see Laura outside, in the parking. She is talking to a man in the proximity of a bottle-green Renault Kangoo little truck. She is helping him handling a few crates. They talk a bit then she goes towards the entrance, just as I am arriving. [...] There are no clients, so I enter Laura's shop with her. It's rather small, narrow and long, with big windows on the right that lighten it up well. The shop is extremely well kept and tidy – something quite difficult to find in grocery shops, especially those selling local things.

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[289] Nickname attributed by me.

[290] My father's parents used to live (and my grandmother still does) just a few meters up the road and we have a piece of forest just at the back of the dairy. I used to come here with my father for playing, walking, picking up chestnuts and looking for fossil shells… cutting wood.

[291] Dialect: "Home-produced stuff".

In the shop, elements from different times and spaces cohabit. A contemporary taste for natural-looking, simple furniture; remnants of old rural life (the cobs hanging, the wicker baskets); *a digitalised till*; *hand-written signs*; *jams and juices from a cooperative in the nearby mountains*; *Chiquita bananas*… Most of the vegetables come from sixteen associates of the cooperative, but sometimes she integrates with other producers that she personally chooses because she trusts them. For example, a guy from Polcenigo, or other fruit producers (our area is quite poor on that side); the rice from Polesine; the pasta from Puglia. *She looks sincerely happy when I compliment for her shop, with a mixture of humility and conviction in what she is doing, which makes her smile and immediately say: "well it's not perfectly ordered today, I must make many more signs"*. Every day she needs writing new ones because goods change, prices change, there is always something new. We start to understand the philosophy at the heart of this project: local, organic and quality produce, sold fresh and almost directly from the producer to the buyer.

The existence of this shop is very much related to the economic downturn and recently changing production-consumption patterns. The cheese market is changing, with increasingly less continuity and revenues, put under strain by the pressure of low-cost industrial (often imported[292]) products. In this context, the cooperative is trying to find a space, a market niche to survive, without compromising on its values. As part of this effort, the shop was founded: to give something more to the consumer and increase presences for the dairy itself (which nonetheless remains the most important source of revenues)[293]. Laura explains to me that associates had been discussing for years the idea of opening a shop where they could also sell their own products, besides the milk. Initially, they wanted to sell meat, but the bureaucracy involved turned out to be very complicated. Furthermore, *she doesn't think it would have been a very successful thing: people buy less and less meat and are increasingly drawn towards vegan diets or in any case are much more into fruits and vegs*. Many vegan people of all ages, sensitive to the quality of food and local produce, go to her shop.

Hence, together with the economic crisis, the existence of the shop is shaped by dietary and socio-cultural transitions towards plant-based diets, changing (global) assemblages of health and sustainability, scientific discourses over the environmental and bodily adverse effects of animal farming, etc. that partially deterritorialise local culinary culture[294]. Interestingly, the same plant-based assemblages that deterritorialise established dietary habits have the paradoxical effect of re-territorialising desires on the ideal of 'local and fresh' produce. Territorial self-sufficiency, a diet based on local

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[292] See §6.2.2, 6.2.4.

[293] Which, by the way, is precisely what has happened to my mother since I pushed her to go there to buy fruits and vegs: she now only buys her cheese as well from the cooperative.

[294] As seen, this was rather dominated, at least since the post-WWII, by cheese, 'poor' meat cuts and pork-based cutlery.

affordances of the land, seasons and weather, the aesthetic appreciation of the singularity of non-standardised plants varieties… these are all 'coming back' after having been strongly deterritorialised by the globalised market economy and large-scale agriculture/distribution that filled supermarkets with plentiful and perfectly-looking but often tasteless produce[295]. This has important socio-economic consequences for the producers and the area more generally, and this is what Laura believes in most strongly, what makes this place so libidinally intense.

For understanding how this is so we need to move to Laura's house.

It's one of those typical rural stone houses that you see in the area. Laura lives in a 1960s built portion of the house, grey and a little sad from the outside. It's not very big. Her parents live next to her, in the old portion, which *opens onto the valley. There is a big gravel open space, and then fields. There are flowers, tools for work in the fields, a small stone house.* Farming is integral to their livelihood, but I understand how much this is so

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[295] As all repetitions, this reterritorialization implies difference. For instance, whereas before (when long-distance transport was not common) 'going local' was spontaneous and driven by convenience and necessity; going to the cooperative's shop is now mostly a matter of <u>*choice*</u>: people come here because they *have chosen to buy local.* Paradoxically, locals do not even come here very often, *especially during the summer*, for *almost everybody has a vegetable garden here in the area*. In many cases, clients drive a long way to buy local – like the one, whom I saw, who came from Pordenone (a town 45 kilometers away).

only thanks to an unexpected occurrence. I was in the house with the children and Laura having breakfast…

at a certain point I hear the sound of a lorry arriving: "it's the milk lorry". At first, I don't understand; I even think that it is the milkman bringing milk to the house. Laura tells me that it may be necessary that I move my car "a little further" otherwise it won't pass through. I go out and do as she says. Actually, what is arriving is a lorry with a cistern for milk transport. I look around better: from the stable adjacent to the parents' old house I can see the head of a white and red cow peeping over. I understand – they are coming <u>to take</u>, not bring, the milk.

I would not have expected to find animals at home despite my acquaintance with the area and knowing Laura's parents were farmers: I thought cattle lived in people's houses only in the stories about the old days gone.

Talking to Laura, I understand that her parents have been founding associates of the cooperative for which she is now working. The cows, the vegetables: this is what they have been doing for the whole of their lives[296]. Small-scale farming was, and still is, a

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[296] Her father was an orphan and, although a very talented artist, he could never leave the valley because he lacked the financial support. Furthermore, his aunts entrusted him

very demanding business for them: both the father and the mother would work in the fields but income was not sufficient to support the whole family. *Laura repeats this often: my mother has worked so much, I do nothing compared to her. During the day she would make the hay all by hand and then she would go wash dishes in the evening. But, she confesses, you see them now: they're destroyed, they've given everything they had, they struggle. They are not old and yet they've got less and less energies*. The intensity of Laura's investment in the cooperative shop is inseparable from this family history, her first-hand knowledge of the efforts of small-size subsistence farming, lines of attachment to the land. She knows, first-hand, that *if you sell to large-scale retail you are left with nothing*; furthermore, many of their products would not even be good for large-scale retail market because they are not in line with the size and aesthetics standards that are required by supermarkets.

The shop is a material and socio-cultural recognition of the fatigues that her parents and people like them endure in producing the food we live by and give them the opportunity of a fair compensation and a dignified life. For this reason she feels *lucky* to work there, but also because she knows that in doing so she is perpetuating the respect for local ecosystems that her parents have always nurtured: *you see me like this, but it's thanks to them that I am like this*. Respect and ecological attentiveness are deeply ingrained in Laura's family, but we cannot conceptualise them as attitudes (solely): they characterise assemblages of things, practices, energy flows, values, sensitivities… that embody in material gestures. The parents have *always treated the land well, always farmed properly* – meaning a low-impact, low-emission and low-resource mode of farming that avoids most of the unsustainable irrationalities that characterise industrial farming. For instance, their cows eat hay and some corn that the father himself produces; but the former especially could not become food for human beings, so cows are transformers of un-useable calories into proteins, fats, sugars.

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house and land at the condition that he looked after them. These circumstances blocked him here, in this house among the hills. *His father then took care of the stable and the vegetables. Before, they used to have more cows. Now they have approximately ten, which live in the stable; up until one year ago they also had a few free-range cows for meat but they have now given up because they are too tired to look after them. They would also like to give up milk production, even because at the moment it really gives them very little. […] climate changes are changing the qualities of the grass, so the quantity of milk has diminished – and this is a problem that all local producers share. Also, the milk is paid very little, 35 cents a litre. All farmers are slowly giving up, because it is not worthwhile for anyone. Laura laments that the State does not help these producers in anything, while it favours those abroad that work with quantity and cut down prices.*

Importantly, their respect for the land and their commitment to natural methods is first of all a matter of necessity – an instance of “environmentalism of the poor” (Alier 2002): for people who have just a few cows, just a small piece of land, little or no capital to invest… respecting the land is not a matter of morality but first of all a need: not burning off its fecundity through chemical fertilisers, not ruining cows’ health through destructive and unnatural feeding[297]. And this cherishing goes hand in hand, co-emerges with, the affective proximity to the animals, the land, the elements.

I could have a sense of this in talking to Laura’s mother. At dusk, in front of their house, I was praising the beauty of the place where they live. *She seems to follow me in this: “yes, it’s beautiful…”; but without too much enthusiasm, as if all in all there was nothing really extraordinary to take notice of.* In such a close relationship with the land, ‘beauty’ as a category of contemplation tends to fade away – the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘landscape’ to disappear in the everyday, banal and yet intense, intercourse with this rural place. This is very different from the almost alienated appreciation of a reified ‘nature’ that urban, middle-class, assemblages produce (which I seem to embody in this conversation). Simultaneously, her slight indifference to ‘beauty’ does not mean indifference to the vitality of this ecosystem. This becomes quite clear as we keep talking and get into speaking of wine-making and organic agriculture. *This seems to interest her very much*. They have a small vineyard and it would surely be economically advantageous to plant more because it affords lots of revenues. Everybody here is doing that[298]. But vineyards here are very demanding if one wants to manage them properly, even because the climate here is not optimal and so it tends to have many problems[299]. And she is not very eager to spend so much time and energy in that kind of agriculture. Hence, instead of planting more, she is tempted to give up the vineyard altogether.

More importantly, Laura’s mother seems very critical of Prosecco monoculture because of its use of pesticides and other synthetic products. More generally, to industrial types of farming, which she constructs as not-good for natural ecosystems at large, she

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[297] *Some time ago, he had tried to feed them some ‘stronger’ food, but it was no good: the cows would get ill, they’d get over-heated. So he went back to natural*. As the casaro told me: *a cow, once it’s dead, it’s dead!*

[298] We are in the hills of the Prosecco DOC and grapes are bought out of small farmers by big wine producers at high price. Right in front of us, as we are talking, is a vineyard that a big producer planted thanks to EU subsidies and then sold when these had *come to an end*. She notices that the current owner keeps the vineyard well, but *it’s a continuous work of going up and down spraying* [pesticides] *from the tractor*.

[299] This area is not at all convenient for the vines, which need a lot of chemical systemic treatments to be able to survive mould, insects and parasites that proliferate in the local humidity.

prefers her small-scale farming activity since it is more in-touch and in-balance with natural rhythms and scales. Hence, to high-revenue but chemical-intensive, destructive, agriculture Laura's parents prefer organic, low-impact farming. Their discourse is about self-sufficiency: having *enough* for living. In this, they resist the drive to commodification and accumulation that is typical of capitalist economies and which – we might say – has caused the "metabolic rift" between human beings and the rest of nature (hence, the ecological crisis) (Foster 2012). To them, land is not an abstract/disembodied source of profit but one of the elements of a dynamic ecosystem: it helps to provide for the needs of the local populations and themselves; a producer of lively, flowing and nourishing matter (food).

This kind of (practical) construction of rurality and agriculture helps food autonomy and self-sufficiency for the area; elements that are, in turn, fundamental for localities to meet an uncertain economy, market and climate. And although this does not seem to be pursued with explicit awareness, a forceful conviction innervates these assemblages – one I can sense in the affective intensities that traverse the small yard, its stones, grass, hay, people and animals. I have a confirmation of this as Laura's father arrives on the tractor…

The evening is calm, there is a beautiful crepuscular light. Hens are scratching about around us and cows in the stable bellow, crickets sing. […] We all remain in the yard for a bit. Laura says hello to the parents and they talk among themselves, intimately. […] The cows start to suddenly moo in a strangely vigorous, almost continuous, way. It seems they're singing their goodbye to the sun setting. It's almost always like this, they tell me. Laura says that I can go and look at them if I want, I shouldn't be shy. I ask if I can bring the camera with me and take some pictures. Well yes, why not?! Her parents almost look baffled: Cows do no harm! Are you afraid? And then, if I don't take pictures of these things… what else?

As *I compliment Laura's father, for it is so beautiful here*, *he proudly says that these are things I cannot easily find around.* His readiness to come and show me around, his openness, is a sign of his attachment to this rural place, linked in turn to a way of experiencing beauty that (even if different from the conspicuous contemplation of the urban dweller) subtly innervates the energy assemblages of this farmhouse.

There are hens, roosters, chicks all around, some of which have flown upstairs and are singing as well. It's all hustle, cheerful. […] The smell of the cows is not pesky here. The children partly play among themselves and partly mind the cows. Later, when we go in the house, Laura gets close to her daughter and comments: "you smell of cow!"

The yard is a zone of proximity where things are in continuous becoming – adults becoming-children; children becoming-animal; animals becoming-plant, becoming-sunset… Surely, there are territorialised relations, rigid (as well as supple) segmentarities traversing this space: the animal in the barn | the human in the house; the children and hens playing around free | the cows chained[300]. These correspond to power relations that

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[300] Watching one of my videos I realised that Laura's daughter was playing with a calf (on chain) telling him/her to stay *fermo immobile* (an emphatic way for saying *in place*, *still*) and then, turning away, saying *now you can move*. Unfortunately, s/he could not. In our area, all cows live in stables. There is not enough space for them to roam around, as the casaro explained to me in the morning: for getting pastures you need to get to the

are established, taken for granted – for instance, animals are there for providing food to human beings. Yet, there is also an affective alliance among these beings: the provision of shelter and food in exchange of milk and eggs, the cow's excrements as fertilisers for the soil…

By working in this loop of production and consumption, limits to the growth of this economy are already settled: no more hay than that produced within the property; no more corn than the excess that remains after the family's consumption; no more effort than what is personally bearable. But how can this life-within-limits, this economy without growth, resist to the pressures of the injunctions of the economy of growth and affluence – even despite the great effort that it entails[301]? I believe one of the answers lays in the libidinal intensity of these assemblages. For, the flows of energy and materials that involve these bodies are also flows of another kind of energy: desire. Their intensity is sticky, entangles bodies to this yard, to this twilight, to these colours and ordinary gestures of care. Laura's father tells me *that these are things I cannot easily find around* – and he says this *proudly*. Simultaneously, it would be a mistake to think that these assemblages are the mindless perpetuation of a never-changing, reified, 'tradition' that stays *fermo immobile*. It is also difference, opening to the other and to the new.

Indicative of this is Laura's life trajectory. Before going (back) to the cooperative, Laura has experienced a long geographical and life detour: a movement of deterritorialisation-reterritorialization. After going to Arts School, Laura went to Peru with a charitable organisation. This has been a life changing experience. She loved being there and she had planned to come back home, get an Art degree and return to Peru to teach children to draw – helping the NGO on the creative and artistic side. *But life got a different direction…* She met her husband and had three children. Attracted by the enthusiasm of the husband for cooking and businesses in the culinary field, she followed him. She started working in his bar – first close to where she lives and then in Vittorio

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mountains, *to Cansiglio*. Here, un-forested land is good for fruits and vegetables production and it is used for that.

[301] One should open a whole different discussion regarding the reasons underlying the fact that self-sufficiency farming is, in our society, so effortful and simultaneously so little rewarding in monetary terms. There is unfortunately no room here for this, but we might notice that surely part of the problem are the fierce competition to which small-scale farmers are subjected by industrial, large-scale, farming and the lack of social means to offset the risks inherently related to agriculture (e.g. pests, extreme climate events). Both are evidently related to specific economic models and not to small-scale farming *per se*.

Veneto[302]. With the husband she would conduct a life, which she defines as *worldly*, that she *had never tried before*: going to restaurants, on holiday to the seaside [303]… Although *at the beginning* these things looked *such a big thing*, after a while these turned out to be sorrowful assemblages: she got *bored* because those activities did not interest her and compelled her to *go against who I was*.

But things did not work out very well with the bar. She found herself with a lot of debts on her shoulders and the husband away, in Romania, because he had found a job there. Laura accepted a job, anything she could find, working as a cleaning woman – *and it was not at all nice*. But she did it. It was a difficult time. When I met her, she was in the process of legally separating from her husband and this also started to open up spaces for the construction of a new existence. Finding the job for the cooperative signed the beginning of a financial, and affective, recovery. Things are starting to get settled and improve, she is finding a balance again. Hence, to the wider implications for local producers and the area, the shop also adds the conditions for the construction of more joyful assemblages at the micro level of Laura's everyday life. She is finding back again a life-space attuned to territorialised lines of desire in which she feels more comfortable.

This is interestingly evident from examples she makes regarding very banal everyday practices, which are telling about her more general relationality with the environment. She tells me that despite her family background, while she was with the husband she would go to the supermarket and carelessly buy industrial cheeses – *anything I would find on the shelf*. Now, instead, it is *difficult* for her to go to the supermarket, and so she tries to at least be more *careful* about what she buys. Not only in terms of food, but also of cleaning products and detergents: she likes those she finds at Coop[304], which are *biodegradable.* And although sometimes she does not manage to go there because of her working hours, she *makes an effort*. Similarly, to the restaurants where her husband

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[302] Her experience working at the bar hurt her particularly because the place was populated of what for her were sorrowful 'bad encounters' (such as drunk and alcoholic people, or husbands having extra-marital affairs, people being violent, etc.).

[303] These habits she links back to the husband's family background: *his father was a factory worker, his mother has always been home, okay, she was a housewife – but anyway he was a factory worker, it'd be a good salary anyway, right? And on Sundays they'd always go to the seaside, they'd go on holiday to the seaside, camping… and they'd go--- they'd always go to eat in restaurants…*

[304] Supermarket that is spread nation-wide and has historically been associated with more ethical and fairer production, consumption and distribution (although it is debatable to what extent it still is) because it was born as a proper cooperative of producers and buyers. It is quite popular among my participants: apart from Laura, also Chiara, Mirko and Elisa, Costantina, Alberta and her parents go there for at least part of their shopping.

would bring her, she prefers *doing other thin--- instead… I'd prepare some sandwiches and go and eat them on the lawn, things like that…*

These practices, she believes, are *more in line with my own nature* and being back in contact with the cooperative was crucial in re-actualising them. *I have started to respect again those values of maybe nearby production [...] which I had lost maybe for some time*. That Laura says "*again*" suggests us that care for the ecologies she inhabits (made of people, plants, animals, things…) is a reterritorialization rather than a completely new discovery. And in fact, she admits, her sensitivity to the environment, sustainability, ecology was already there:

I had it already but then it was fading and now… it's coming back!

In other words, she had pushed aside concerns over socio-economic and ecologic issues that she is now re-embracing. Her new job is *almost a vocation* that responds to her coming from a *farming situation* and to her commitment to *respecting what you have*, *valuing the land*. By going against 'her own' nature, Laura was also going against the rest of nature. Now, instead, she finds joy in re-actualising those assemblages of frugality and sobriety that are part of her familial culture. Laura thus constructs a narrative of 'fall' and redemption that interestingly co-emerges with the vicissitudes of the local (food) economy: from a rural, simple and innocent life to the *lures* (as Homica would say) and sorrows of a worldly 'civilised modernity' (embodied by the husband); and back again to (her) nature – also co-emerging with her restoring the house close to her childhood one. The latter's intensity made Laura so attached to certain (everyday) life assemblages that even a momentary fascination with the novelty of affluence soon faded.

But again, her re-territorialisation is creative and includes an opening to other worlds of difference. I was quite impressed, for example, by the fact that Laura never criticised vegans for dietary and ethical choices that are markedly different from the ones she and her family live by. A book of vegan recipes even inhabits her house, part of her effort to improve the service she provides at the shop: suggesting new recipes to the client, getting to better know the potentialities of the various vegetables she sells. To this aim she also does not scorn the use of social media and the internet, despite not being a very hi-tech inclined person:

Sometimes there are vegetables that we don't know, or are little grown for the great distribution. But now they are coming back because of small productions. Yet people often *have no idea of what to do with them. So she, also thanks to pages "like Giallozafferano" that she follows, manages to suggest new ideas: websites proposing modern recipes, new and with special varieties. I can see that, for her, discovery of the new and experimentation are important: "it's a way of remaining alive", she admits.*

Technology, social media, websites, etc. function as tools, in the shop-assemblage, to become more intelligent, widening her and her clients' capacity to relate to kinds of matter that had gone lost as a result of the hegemony of industrialised production and distribution. A re-enlivening of old things apparently gone, although differently – with new recipes and tastes. And admittedly this might be seen as just one latest mode that capital has to re-launch itself: a chase of the new through the old to advertise through multinational-funded websites. This voracious market is, in some ways, penetrating these rural everyday life and work assemblages. As these are accepted quite unquestioningly by Laura, her constant search for the new and unforeseen is like a funambulist's, constantly on the verge of falling on the other side: creativity as strategy of appropriation of nature. Nonetheless, the pragmatics of her situation suggest that these assemblages tend to escape this logic and instead initiate a process of "fabulation" along different lines. The creative effort for *remaining alive* becomes a way to start building not only a new life but also new collectives, new alliances and new modalities of believing in life: it is the quest for an intensity that happens in-between human beings and plants, things.

With her clients, she explains to me, true and fully-fledged relationships get formed even thanks to her attitude: they come back, tell her what they think about this or the other recipe, they teach her new ways of using things… […] And this passion for experimentation she also finds in the farmers she collaborates with. She talks with true affection about the growers who bring her vegetables. […] Even those who used to use conventional methods or did not grow things properly, thanks to the presence of the shop – both being able to talk to her and to other fellow producers – are now changing their own practices towards natural approaches; and they are improving their businesses.

Laura's and the shop's presence function as a material but also libidinal push for a withdrawal from taken-for granted but ecologically problematic ways of farming; it produces livelier practices of production, exchange and distribution.

In and through plants (the intense affectivity of their taste, their nourishing potencies, their strange, singular, colours and shapes…), a new collective is growing. In becoming-plant, local farmers, sellers and buyers are thus infused with the energy of going on, of believing in a different future…

L: because I really see… not all of my clients but many people who really believe in this, yeah. […] Eee but this is a--- for many people this is a--- for many it's a--- a mirage, right? Yes. This gives me some confid--- I mean it gives me the idea that eeh this area is a little--- it's getting back a little of… enthusiasm, right? […] And so I feel <u>*alive*</u>*, right? In this sense. […] And I think it will increasingly happen […] There are many people really believing in this and struggling for this*
A: mh mh
L: but not like obsessed, or maybe because of fashion… of maybe… certain things
A: yeah
L: just in a very simple way, constant, every day.

It is the re-enlivening of a place of desire, a trans-human collective flourishing (*again*) after a very dead and depressed period (for her personally and for the area she lives in). And interestingly, although this change might be constructed in terms of people doing 'their bits' and not changing much after all, Laura remarks that *it isn't a small change*: it <u>seems</u> small but has a quality of endurance, collective effort and *belief* that makes it 'big'.

As such, the grass-roots transition happening in the valley fills her with *hope* in the future and changes her vision of the crisis:

for example, many people see this as a bleak period[305]*. I cannot see it like that. For me instead…* <u>*it's good*</u>*, a good period*

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[305] As, paradoxically, the 'rich' (but well territorialised on late capitalist assemblages) Erika did: *no, I'm not serene because… well, talking about myself, I'm not… how can I be serene?! Three children; aaand of an age when the most grown up need everything and have not clear yet what kind of route they'll be following. They always tend to swerve, especially the youngest. So there is much concern. Even in the evening, you go to bed and sleep because you are tired but… eh! What do you think of? The future! That with this crisis you do not really know how things will work out. […] for them, who are still to build their own future… this really concerns me*. Interestingly, whereas concerns for the children take Erika energy <u>away</u>, Laura talks about her three children as energisers (despite requiring also much energy): what gives her the strength to *get up in the morning* (not something that disturbs her nights). Her detachment from capitalism and its discontents, hence, not only affords her a different everyday experience of work and

And although this transition has to do – in part – with some kind of 'return' to rurality, it is no 'going back' to an idealised past at all. Laura makes it clear. Actually, the crisis is an opportunity for renewal and improvement. For in the past, farmers would just *work the land*, *endure the situation* as it were, and *with a slightly blunt mentality* as well. Now, instead, simple and more frugal livelihoods are chosen, they are embraced differently as a positive project:

L: we we are forced to endure the fact that the crisis does not give you a job, let's say, the way you'd like, but at least you… I see, I don't know, the people I talk to and maybe are… happier and more… open in approaching a new reality. Well, not everybody, to be sure. But there is a big number of people who want to change their life style, yeah yeah […] they accept different roles aaand
A: mh
L: and this makes them calmer, more… I dunno, more more… maybe… more people, like, right?! I dunno...
A: mh! [we laugh] maybe with a truer relationship with reality?
L: yesss yes yes yes. More human, that's it

The experience of the crisis leads some *people* to choose to live in an *alternative* way. This change includes working towards the creation of *a more sustainable, more natural, environment* and with it a better livelihood. It is a project of affective intensity, first of all, because it aims to build a 'good life' that is lively *human* – as opposed to (deadly) capital-oriented. It is also about local autonomy and self-determination. Conviviality and mutual help connect flows of people and things[306]. And the hope that infuses this endeavour comes from its collective character: not merely the choice between available market alternatives but rather the construction of altogether different economies[307] made of independency-in-interdependency, trust (for instance, in the shop,

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future prospects for the local communities, but also helps her experience personal, affective and intimate relations with the colourful lightness of play.

[306] Like the other night, when the guy from Polcenigo came at dinner time to deliver some vegetables *because he also has another job and could only deliver at that time*… and Elisa cooked dinner for him. Despite being very busy, she found the time for being together.

[307] In this light we can also map the antipathy that Laura feels against Ariele, the organic supermarket chain for which Alberta and Erika work. She admits: *I don't find it really… to do with nature*, *more a matter of business, of image. That nonetheless, in the end, does*

not all of the associates are certified organic, but she knows them one by one and knows how they work), gift, beauty… <u>joy</u>. Differently from standardised industrial products and experiences, this economy is made of light and dark, different seasons, smells, mud, soil – *love for nature* in its radical affective alterity. A flourishing that

won't make us rich, maybe, but at least will make us free

It might not be all fine and good, it might be less wealthy. But, as Laura has learnt in her family, when *nobody is that wealthy* you can always *help each other* and in so doing manage to *keep on going*, <u>together</u>.

And so, here we are, back to where we started: <u>becoming-poor</u>.
And yet, differently…

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not... it does not bring you to the appreciation of the tastes of of the land, of... [...] <u>it's not natural</u>, I cannot understand the link really, that's it. Even this whole thing of a never-ending production, always, all year round... and instead we need to go back to having a balance, right? Even throughout the day itself [...]natural rhythms. [...] As far as I am concerned, I do not see much future there. Everybody says organic is the future – but organic I do not see as--- also, I wouldn't even call it organic. I would just call it... <u>love for nature</u>, yeah. but not with the certification and things like that... In its alienated mode of being, similar to that of the *factory*, of *business*, of spectacle, of bureaucratised standards and labels, etc. Laura encapsulates the greenwashed version of the same, current, deadly economy.

Chapter Seven

(Un)conclusive remarks: present, past, future in becoming. Cartographies of everyday energies

This thesis has set the scene for an understanding of transitions in the use of energy at the micro level of everyday life as embedded in wider socio-historical transitions and moments of rupture; simultaneously, it has emphasised the momentary-ness, singularity, eventfulness of becomings. I tried to respect such irreducibility through a voluntarily diffractive analysis. 'I' have let myself be guided by the intensity of data. Only sometimes have I intervened more actively pointing to commonalities or differences between them. Without the will and need to close down this openness, it is now time to weave some relevant lines *across* our cases to take stock and synthesise points that are key to our reflection. For, despite their singularities, our cases and locale can talk about things wider than themselves (Roberts and Henwood 2018) and call for a view of energy transitions as *collective*: interested in assemblages (of desire), socio-economic dispositives, political arrangements. This chapter will be devoted to taking up this broad perspective, also in dialogue with existing literature and methodological debates. I end with some general considerations on ecologies, energy and trans-human assemblages.

7.1. Weaving lines in and through the crisis

I started with the premise, not absolute but widely shared, that sustainability needs a radical economic-ecologic change, a paradigm shift that would bring humanity in new alliances with non-human nature – which the capitalist economy, driven by growth and accumulation, seems unable to foreground and sustain (Sayer 2014). One of our interests was assessing whether being-in-crisis might imply an 'acceleration' or intensification of the lines of flight that traverse everyday energy assemblages and challenge the "*necropolitics* of dominant liberalism" (Palidda 2018: 13, my translation). We saw that the stretched pool of time and virtualities we call "crisis" always works with apparently personal, singular, events and life transitions – unemployment, divorce, growing adult, having children… – to set in motion or block processes of (ecological) becoming.

As a synthesis, it might be said here that our cases do seem to support the idea that lines of flight from capitalist unsustainable assemblages are 'accelerated' and put in motion by the conjuncture of economic *and* ecologic instability, which challenges the material, energetic and libidinal hold of late capitalism. Conscious and unconscious critique to the organisation of (everyday) life has produced ecologically promising pushes and transitions such as downshifting and voluntary simplicity (Homica), a 'return to the land' (Alberta), (partially) giving up wealth for time, pleasure, happiness etc. (Onurbio, Erika). Other lines of investment, such as the resilient frugality of the working classes and the affective proximity to the land of subsistence farmers, are given a new sense, articulation, intensity and actualisation in the context of reduced affluence and environmental degradation (Manuela and Valerio, Laura) (Thomas et al. 2016).

Nonetheless, that these lines of flight can manage to find a reterritorialisation for the productive construction of new collectives and socio-economic organisations is far from obvious. First, there is a libidinal pull towards established energy-intensive assemblages, habitual ways of doing, feeling, sensing, thinking – convenience and comfort of car transport; forms of conspicuous consumption for clothes, exotic holidays; the articulation of enjoyment and pleasure via consumption (of energy-intensive things, experiences) and of labour as means to afford it. More generally, anti-ecological patterns of socio-economic organisation tend to remain in place, such as the binary between production and reproduction, labour and consumption. This implies that even the basic necessaries of life are subjected to processes of energy-intensive commodification that curtail opportunities for ecologically-virtuous, convivial, modes of (re)production. Another example is the cultivation of self-enclosed identities (facialities) that need to be supported by energy-intensive practices (e.g. body-care and conspicuous consumption) and at the same time generate a rigid binary with nature-as-landscape – the latter remaining experienced as a disposable object impossible to (re)embed in.

Despite the fact that these capitalist processes and assemblages are often life-diminishing (ecologically problematic *and* taking energy, time and resources away from the affectivity of other, sometimes more intensely vital, desires) they remain active, hold whole lives together. If feasible and available, libidinally strong, alternatives are lacking, lines of flight find their way back to these well-known territories. Sometimes, the anguish and fear that the crisis provokes are so big that even stronger and more forceful reterritorialisations take place (Onurbio, Erika, Alberta were the most evident instances of this happening). In other cases, lines of flight are reterritorialised on apparent alternatives that nonetheless resemble too closely what they flew from – like greenwashed and bloodwashed market economies (Mirko, Chiara and Elisa; partly Alberta). In this context, the power of the market and the capacity it has to subsume radical ecological alternatives into established modes of production, exchange and consumption become evident (e.g. the company for which Alberta works and in which she so much believes: the “green” version of capitalist large-scale production and distribution companies; vegan products becoming mainstream within the capitalist market economy and “going vegan” substituting struggles for wider political change, see §6.3.3). Energies and desire for change, potentially disruptive for the capitalist economy, are channelled back to capitalist (life) formations through what appears, on the basis of the preceding analysis, a lure: ethical and green consumption *within* capitalism. But I have also argued that this happens because, once made mainstream, the ‘green’ alternative is by itself rendered “super-limp”, as Homica would say: too similar to what already exists, it does not manage to capture ‘revolutionary’ desires that would reach for radical alterity.

We have also seen assemblages in which molecular and ecologically-sound lines of practice and desire were present all the way through (Valerio and his downshifting, ethical purchase groups, gift economies; Costantina and her sober intensity; Manuela’s proud frugal resilience). Yet, the suppleness of these lines, the lack of the experience of the flight, also has drawbacks: because it does not make space for a “void”, a forceful deterritorialisation that puts on hold given territories, they tend to oscillate between an ecologically-virtuous molecularity and established, taken for granted, unsustainable assemblages, by which they remain partially invested.

We have witnessed, finally, possibilities for radically novel reterritorialisations: lines of flight articulate in concrete assemblages made of more respectful, trans-human relationalities. Thanks to his encounter with radical ecology literature, for instance, Homica managed to produce novel ecologies of everyday life. Laura’s experience with the cooperative (involvement in *collective* production of communities, relationalities, trans-human alliances) opened hopeful and productive visions for the future in which the crisis became an opportunity for more joyful existences. That this can happen requires both a shared horizon of sense and the material production of new assemblages. I will come back to this below.

7.2. In dialogue with existing literature: sketching critical and positive contributions

In this section I consider, in general terms, what contributions the above analysis can give to existing debates on energy transitions and everyday life. This will also be an occasion to 'take stock' and put forth a few general considerations emerging from analysis.

Maybe the whole 'problematisation' of this thesis started with a critique to neoliberal approaches of environmental policy-making and their anthropological-methodological premises. One of the main points of contestation centred around the faith in individual behaviour change as a driver of everyday energy transitions. The analysis above supports the hypothesis that this approach is, on the one hand, misguided and, on the other, politically and ecologically dangerous. It emphasises, in line with social practice, discursive, interpretive and psychosocial approaches, that so-called individual "choices" always emerge within a milieu made of objects, knowledges, discourses, meanings, but also drives and desires that are neither rational nor controllable. There will be therefore little sense in counting on the good will of each social actor to, for instance, cut energy consumption without at the same time reconsidering and reshaping the socio-economic and libidinal organisation of everyday assemblages. Further, until this wider questioning is carried out, late capitalism will continue to exert its destructive force over humans and non-humans alike (Fisher 2009).

Let us make a few specific examples from analysis. We have seen, time and again, the role that "state of things" have in shaping affordances of energy use. For instance, wood stoves and particularly cooking stoves have their own potency in determining sustainable and efficient energy assemblages because of their very constitution: they work through the use of zero-emissions, renewable, 'fuel' and simultaneously perform different functions – heating, cooking, roasting, de-freezing, recycling. Yet, that they can be present at all in a household depends on a number of other (material) conditions: space for wood to be kept, know-how, urban legislation, organisation of time and the availability of personal energy to deal with the work they entail (Vannini and Taggart 2014). Hence, having and using a wood stove is not and cannot be a mere matter of "choice". Patterns of transport are similarly dependent on infrastructures, not merely individuals' "attitudes". For instance, as roads are more and more trafficked, they are dangerous, as well as unpleasant, to cycle or walk through; furthermore, public transport is not always available – especially in non-urban areas (Roberts and Henwood 2018; Hagbert and Bradley 2017). Hence, the use of the car seems almost unavoidable despite many of my participants lamenting about it. As social practice scholars (e.g. Shove 2003;

Shove and Walker 2007) argue, a more sustainable mobility needs a complete reshaping of these very arrangements.

Yet, transport is also a case in point of how material arrangements always co-emerge with "assemblages of enunciation" (on which qualitative discursive research has concentrated most: e.g. Feindt and Oels 2005; Capstick et al. 2015) to concretise in specific dispositives. For instance, increasing urbanisation implies that the majority of our society's key services, institutions, workplaces, leisure and consumption spaces are more and more concentrated in urban areas – which requires people from the countryside to commute often if they want to access them (we saw this with Costantina). The contemporary organisation of time[308] and the busyness of work-based life (see Rosa 2003) requires quick, easy and flexible mobility (which was particularly evident in the case of working mothers: Erika and Laura). Autonomy and independence are socially and culturally valued. Physical activity is increasingly constructed in terms of leisure and sport, not daily transport – so that bodies themselves are not used (even in bare terms of strength) to move outside the walls of a gym or the hours of free time. Availability of cheap transport also allows us to 'dwell into' what Alberta identifies as a "laziness" that, for instance, makes her drive to her horse's stables despite the presence of a convenient and beautiful cycling path along the river and among fields.

Overall, these reflections – largely in line with social practices approaches – call attention to the material, institutional and cultural arrangements along which everyday energy assemblages are shaped, while de-emphasising individual responsibility for change (Marres 2009; Butler 2010). Nonetheless, the above analysis also emphasises the centrality of *experience* as an integral part of everyday energy use and transitions. This brings us closer to psychosocial and interpretive approaches and their call for a research that is sensitive to the local meanings and concrete, affective, dimensions of energy use (e.g. Black and Cherrier 2010; Hargreaves et al. 2010; Hards 2012). In particular, the cases above support the need of integrating energy transitions and wider considerations around the "good life", desire, human flourishing (Groves et al. 2015; 2016): unless this happens, they will neither be feasible nor desirable because imposed on recalcitrant bodies as a matter of 'governance' (Shove and Walker 2010).

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[308] Notably, it has been argued that at the basis of unsustainable over-exploitation of the planet is the detachment of contemporary societies from natural rhythms (Adam 1997). This argument, together with everyday life experience, suggests that a social re-embedding in ecological temporalities is crucial to sustainability (Mayer and Knox 2006).

Some of our cases show that a transition implying energy consumption reduction, resilience, sobriety in the context of the crisis *can happen*, but it is necessary that a number of other meanings and affective dispositions converge. Manuela and Valerio's molecular lines of 'poor' desire from their past enable to experience reduced affluence and consumption as relatively unimportant – indeed, they become the opportunities for novel joys; 'poor' habits and narratives become a novel source of pride, are re-valued (differently) as a positive capability. Thus "textured" (Thomas et al. 2016) the constitution of more sustainable assemblages becomes joyous and "natural". Homica and Alberta suggest that available *narratives* of different, low carbon, societies are important to productively imagine and make new energy futures and assemblages (see Hagbert and Bradley 2018). But we have also seen that in order for them to be active in shaping sustainable transitions they need to become significant, part of the affective texture of the everyday. Conversely, the *lack* of narratives and of a felt drive towards sustainability implies an in-capacity to imagine alternative energy assemblages, as Onurbio testifies when he admits not to be able to even imagine anything different from the everyday life he knows.

An "experience-near research" (Hollway 2009) finally sensitises us to the need to go beyond what is arguably the commonest way of framing energy use – i.e. in terms of morality, abstract values, Kantian universalist ethics of "respect" for the planet and its inhabitants (Smith and High 2017). I have argued this in the case of my vegan participants, whose sustainable transitions were at times apparently driven by a moral imperative to give up unsustainable practices. I have argued that this approach is undesirable because it tends to dismiss the complexity of Life itself in favour of an abstract idea of what is 'good'. In so doing it becomes a source of (mutual) closure towards different energy experiences *and* of resentment, as the repression of certain desires provokes frustration. Further, it has dangerous political consequences because once certain assemblages (often institutionally defined by "higher bodies", such as the UN) are recognised as more ecological and therefore *morally superior*, they tend to be unquestioningly accepted and ideally universally imposed. Finally, this approach is even ineffective in ecological terms because limitation "rebounds" in (compensatory?) energy intensive practices, such as intercontinental flights.

My analysis thus supports an immanent approach to everyday energy ethics grounded in the lived experience of everyday life (Groves et al. 2017; Frigo 2017)[309]. The

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[309] In this, I also distance myself from many psychoanalysis-inspired contributions that rely on instilling, cultivating and working through sense of guilt for ecological damage

suggestion would then be to work sensitively with and through everyday desires and lines of flight to map their immanent potential for critique against collective life-diminishing assemblages: in this way, lively demands have the potential to shape new horizons of energy transitions that are both ecologically and existentially *sustainable*, for humans and non-humans alike.

What, I believe, remains at this point to be investigated are two important facets of everyday energy use: first, all those more intractable affective, desiring and libidinal lines at work through everyday assemblages; second, how they are shaped and traversed by forces that are political and economic. And, according to our conceptualisation of desire and subjectivity, it will be easily understood that these are far from being two different businesses. Psychoanalytic approaches to everyday energy, as seen above, have already tackled the ‘obscure’ side of desires (e.g. Weintrobe 2013a; Randall 2009; Lertzman 2015). Yet, I believe that the above analysis brings us far from their conclusions and particularly against the ‘negative’ view of desire as conflictual, neurotic, anxiety-ridden, defended, etc., which prevents energy transitions from happening.

This is not to deny that desire is also responsible for continuing “investment in unsustainability” (Groves et al. 2016). Indeed, this is repeatedly visible throughout my data set. Mobility, particularly flying, is a case in point: most often an unquestioned and unquestionable practice even among the most ecologically-conscious and parsimonious energy users. Its impacts are variously and regularly denied, justified, minimised. Roberts and Henwood (2018), observing a similar phenomenon, argue that the effects of flying are disavowed both discursively and practically/affectively, so that people are able to not ‘see’ the conflict between pro-environmental values and this practice. Hence, we are reminded of the force of unconscious desire to shape the ‘rationality’ and ethical values to which we normally appeal as drivers of sustainable transitions.

(e.g. Randall 2009; Weintrobe 2013a). To me, in fact, aligning desire to a putative “reality principle” defined by regimes of signification amounts to a transcendent critique that little has to do with desire as such and, in the end, to a disciplinary practice of life regimentation. It is not that one cannot distinguish, albeit tentatively, “good” from “bad” practice in ecological terms – for its consequences can be empirically assessed from time to time: does it support or destruct life? What I try to resist, instead, is the temptation to produce a universally-applicable pre-determined idea of what a sustainable livelihood is or should be, and to this conform desire. Hence, the point is not that ethical considerations *should not intervene* in life choices, but that they should inter-weave with, and be responsive to, lines of desire.

But this case also allows me to introduce one first element of difference between my approach and other psychoanalytically oriented ones – i.e. thinking desire in *social and collective* terms, not individual-subjective. If travelling and flying to other parts of the world might indeed entail productive transformative encounters that change and open one's ways of assembling with the world, we might as well hypothesise that their so much recurrent libidinal intensity is the result of cultural and socio-economic pulls that intersect with singular lines of desire: consumption of cultural, geographical and 'experiential' difference; centuries of capitalist euro-centric expansion and colonisation that infiltrate our everyday life; the myth of the new and unseen; the social distinction that it affords; the social (and financial) recognition (and power) that mobile jobs afford. These lines of desire are, in turn, largely emerging along capitalist flows. We are thus faced with the necessity of criticising the social 'machines' that produce these apparently psychological experiences. Differently, one either ends up repressing desire, attributing responsibility for change to self-denying individuals, or one resigns to the drive to consume the earth (in all senses) – and wait for "the system" to change.

Critiquing everyday life can help us in understanding what is it that channels desire most forcefully in our present, and in what directions. Further, we can look for those instances that tell us that things can be otherwise – and try to "precipitate" their potential. For instance, there are three cases among my participants in which a strong drive to ecologically-impacting mobility is simply not present: Manuela and her husband, Homica, Laura. All of them (in their different ways) are able to establish an affectively charged and joyous relation with what is proximate and cultivate the intensity of slowness; they *do not like* many of the places and activities of tourist free-time, or the alienating time-space produced by fast and energy-intensive means of transport. *And yet*, they are not closed on themselves: only, open by other means. And it might not be by chance that the biographical trajectories of these participants have inhabited somewhat "minor" spaces within the dominant capitalist (libidinal) economy (they include experiences of downshifting, self-subsistence farming and DIY that challenge market forms of production and reproduction of existence). These cases suggest us that there is nothing *intrinsically* attractive about contemporary modes of travel and mobility (in which excitement and the experience of the conspicuously *new* – in turn involving often energy-intensive assemblages such as fast transport, accommodation facilities, gentrification, etc. – are constructed as desirable and desired); they provide different models, narratives, everyday values and politics that we might cultivate in the interest of building more ecological mobility patterns.

In saying this, I introduce a second element of difference with the majority of psychoanalytic approaches: an emphasis on desire as continuously productive, deterritorialising and creative force that can *foreground*, instead of hindering, change in energy assemblages. For, if desire is one of the names we can call our assemblages – then what other than *desire itself* can *de*territorialise unsustainable ones and serve as driver for ecological transitions[310]? Think about Onurbio's call for *some air*, Erika's search for freedom and affection, Homica's willingness to use the bike for commuting for meeting his need to move. These pulls were affective much more than materialistic, did not call for commodities or affluent luxuries. To the contrary, they often showed how the latter diminished freedom of expression and potency (I will go back to this in the very conclusion). But what are these lines of flight if not bodies' rebellions to dispositives (flows of energy, desire, matter) that seek to capture, mould, traverse, enable, 'enhance'… their flesh? Hence, I proposed attention to such embodied experience, and critique, to be one of the tasks of the study of everyday life.

In talking about bodies, I introduce another, final, point of departure from mainstream psychoanalytic approaches to the environment. These are often concerned with patterns of signification. Although any kind of relationality emerges within and through systems of meaning, we should not be blind to the fact that affective proximities pass through the bodily and desiring intensities of sensuous matters. For instance, wood stoves are chosen over gas heating *also* because "natural warmth is better", as Laura said; local famers' over industrial food because it is tastier; self-made curtains over ready-made ones because of the pleasure (and pride) of self-production; windfall fruits because of the affective intensity of dwelling into one's environment, investment in/by its colours and texture… Energy use and transitions cannot be separated from these a-significant and a-rational qualities that are integral to everyday experiences (Chatti et al. 2017). This does not imply a sort of technological or material determinism according to which things and objects straightforwardly 'call' for attraction, repulsion or attachment. Rather, it

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[310] We should be clear, though, that this does not mean favouring a self-affirmative and nihilistic liberalisation of desire. Take Valerio's case. He is in constant flight from disciplinary apparatuses of all kinds and claims *his own* right to desire. This does involve sustainable practices and creations, but also a continuing investment in/by ecologically problematic, appropriative ones – a will-to-power that is very similar to the individualistic and self-affirmative logic of capital. The model he embodies thus does not provide any directions as to how best to think our embeddedness in socio-economic and ecological systems. What I have instead sought to do is to respect the irreducibility of desire and, of it, ask: what are its effects, its opportunities for change, its territorialisations on unsustainable assemblages? In doing this, the critique of everyday life has taken the form of a mapping of the potentialities and dangers of desiring productions.

emphasises a need to cultivate and listen to the potencies of bodies' assemblies when imagining and shaping pathways of energy transitions.

In this context, I believe it is important to make an aside to better consider *what matters come to matter*, so to speak. There seem to be some things, objects and practices that are more 'potent' in terms of environmental concerns than others. *Food* is certainly one of these: Laura, Valerio, Alberta, Mirko, Chiara and Elisa are maybe the most evident instances, but it returns almost as a refrain throughout analysis – for Costantina, Manuela and her husband… Food appears to be an *intense* kind of matter. It might be understandable that this is the case – for food is most deeply and dynamically co-implicated in our processes of bodily (re)production, finely becoming part of our bodies, quite literally. Other forms of matter and energy seem to matter more than others – e.g. those involved in mobility: bikes can be very invested and affectively intense objects, for example, that are able to embody both ideals and practices of ecological reconnection (Rinkinken et al. 2015); but also water.

These 'intense matters' are promising in terms of sustainable transitions because they are affectively relevant: they have an immanent significance to people's everyday lived experience. Differently from abstract and universalist calls to 'justice' and responsibility towards ecologies or the planet or distant others these kinds of energy and matters directly impinge on our lives, *on the skin*, organs, reproductive processes, senses and bodily motions. Yet, this makes for an ambivalent status. For, on the one hand, this intensity has the capacity to expand to other levels and relationalities. As seen with my vegan participants, commitment to organic or plant-based food can become the driver of change in many other life practices that acquire new significance, are seen through the new eyes of a sensitivity attuned to the world's lively intermeshing. But on the other, these matters are *so* intense that they almost seem to obscure, or divert attention from, other kinds of matter – maybe distant or less sensitively conspicuous and yet as much, or even more, ecologically significant. Valerio's case, for instance, testifies to the fact that (healthy, organic) food, by being strongly invested sustainability-wise, takes away energy from other sustainable transitions and allows the enduring presence of anti-ecological practices that are not so conspicuous (e.g. car use, consumption of disposable clothes).

This tension seems to suggest a *caveat* to some nascent "post-representational" approaches to everyday energy use (e.g. Vannini and Taggart 2014): affective intensities, though they need to circulate through the energy assemblages of everyday life, should not be reduced to bare matters of sensuousness – even sensuous reconnection. Whenever I have pointed to efforts to live sustainably on a number of different levels we have indeed seen that bodily involvement with lively matter was always innervated, traversed and articulated by *thoughts/discourses* – ethics, moralities, values, discourses – that brought them to the more-than-immediate: beyond the here-and-now towards an ecology of flows past, present, future, local, global, seen and unseen. To be sure, these are no less *desiring* than the sensuous ones, and yet differently necessary to articulate a significant lived critique to hegemonic and unsustainable flows of energy. I will later consider the methodological implications of this.

In talking about the materiality and productivity of desire we gradually approximate a central issue to any ecological reflection: *limit.* The unsustainability of current economies and everyday practices is in fact strictly related to the limits of our planet, as a source of materials and as receptor of our 'waste'. At the same time, limit is central to the cultivation of humble, less appropriative and more ecological assemblages at both micro and macro scale. Limit is common currency in sustainability discourses, even at institutional and policy level, because it is thought that one of the ways we can "help" our ecosystems is by *limiting* many of our wasteful practices (close the tap, switch off the light, reduce the use of the car…). But I have also just argued that limit(ation) *per se* should not (and possibly cannot) be the foundation for a different relationship to ecologies: energy transitions can be experientially 'sustainable' only if they involve productive engagement with desire.

We saw this with Manuela and Valerio, Homica, Laura, Costantina, but also with Alberta: for all of them, the basis for an ecological, low-energy, and yet rich life was precisely the (sometimes active) putting a limit on acquisition and appropriation. In doing so, desire was kept alive and affects/potencies intensified: lives made affectively richer, sensuous, wild and in constant search for beauty. Here the importance of matter comes back in view, as an affectively rich limit passes through a lively and bodily reconnection with matter and energy (or at least a pull in this sense) (Vannini and Taggart 2014; see also Hagbert and Bradley 2017). In line with critical ecology intuitions, lived life shows that whenever bodily processes of assembly *do* intervene in-between human and non-human bodies, heightened sensitivity to the ecologically embedded nature of our existence ensues[311]: a renewed and rediscovered connection with the material constitution

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[311] This is most evident with Homica's relationship to matter and what is normally considered waste. While he puts strong limits on the acquisition of new objects and on his use of polluting energy sources, his "illness" is that of accumulating old objects of all kinds. He continuously manipulates matter with mind and body together, there is an intense pleasure in this process of assembly. As soon as a lamp, or a fridge, or a piece of

of life – its affordances, temporalities, limits and capacities (e.g. Shiva 2009; Salleh 2017).

Interestingly, (desire for) *affectively rich limit* and *material reconnection* also have politically emancipatory effects. First, material limit in a world of omnipresent commodities generates a certain autonomy of desire that eschews it from given determinations, towards a 'minor' suppleness that is more sensitive to singular needs than socially defined ones (Deleuze and Parnet 2007). We saw this with Alberta: by limiting purchase out of ecological concerns, she realised she already had even *too many* clothes, which were even a burden to her life: her felt needs came to be at odds with the demands of an economy of infinite growth. Secondly, material limit pushes subjects to produce conditions of autonomy from established flows of matter and power. In line with Schlosberg and Coles's (2015) observations, these take the form of a "new materialism of everyday life" in which social actors strive to restore control over the conditions of their existence by re-appropriating in a sustainable and materialist way the flows of matter and energy at its basis. Valerio's GAS; Homica's DIY; Manuela and her husband mending and restoring objects otherwise considered 'trash'; Laura's active involvement in the cooperative and its evolution. These are all examples of (more or less conscious) resistance against what I have called "a world out of control": a globalised economy-ecology where we are led to (reactively) perceive both the affordances and the consequences of our daily business as separated from our own potency (Schlosberg and Coles 2015; Hagbert and Bradley 2017)[312].

Such re-appropriation opens opportunities to resist that 'perverse' tendency to split the world into evil/powerful and good/powerless. By taking back the fundamentals of life in our hands we are simultaneously reclaiming responsibility *within* the very assemblages that make up our everyday existence – with all this entails. This does not mean forgetting that power is differentially distributed and unquestioningly accept what

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wood get into his hands they stop being disposable objects and instead become alive. This affective involvement challenges the boundary between human beings (active) and matter (passive) – while not reducing the one to the other. But also, as we have seen, it deterritorialises the rigid, hierarchical, binary between useful objects and waste that so much foregrounds the ecologically destructive incapacity of our society to function in a circular manner.

[312] Admittedly, we might see in this move a 'closure', even an immunisation response (Esposito 2004; see also Pellizzoni 2011) to the anxiety-provoking feeling that our bodies are continuously traversed by elements that we do not know, cannot control, are possibly damaging 'bad encounters'. Nonetheless, I believe that there is more to this desire – a more that might be conducive both to an engaged politics of the everyday *and* to sustainable energy assemblages – as I am going to argue.

is often being imposed upon us as individuals: equal responsibility for 'sustainable' behaviour change. It rather entails working towards the re-appropriation of the power to make and determine things (see also Hobson 2016). Furthermore, the will to gain knowledge of the world (and thus the potency to better assemble with it) does not necessarily mean being willing to *appropriate* or *master* it better – quite the contrary, it might be precisely the occasion to experience it in all of its irreducible wonder and complexity, while simultaneously re-embedding ourselves more consciously in its dynamic cycles. Doing so, we can also become more sensitive to the potencies, endurances, limits of our ecologies – hence abler to work within their thresholds of sustainability.

7.2.1. The everyday: a space of radical eco-social change?

To conclude this section, I would like to go back to the everyday. One of the interests of this study was assessing how much everyday life can be the site of change and resistance to (unsustainable) molar assemblages, towards different ecological relationalities. Overall, we might say that the everyday is surely the site of repetition *and* difference, as observed in the chapter above. Throughout analysis, we have encountered many lines of flight from, and 'molecular' challenges to, dominant ecologically destructive flows of matter-desire. To what extent these are able to produce significant and long-lasting changes is controversial. Even in as far as the analysis above is concerned, a longitudinal design would be needed to assess how far those moments of openness and rupture *have* led to the constitution of more ecological energy assemblages. What can nonetheless be said is that significant change needs to find *collective* territories on which to settle and then flourish (Schlosberg and Coles 2015). A line of flight that does not find novel reterritorialisations either ends up in a sterile black hole or reverts back to the assemblages that it was fleeing from (or a similar version of them). When it finds its way into the material and cultural soil of social life, even those apparently inconspicuous events that shake territorialised assemblages might become the source for wider, and conspicuous, change (see Stenner 2017).

Yet, the distinction between what is to be counted as positive collective construction or individualistic 'retreat' is by itself not clear-cut. For instance, Valerio's taking part in ethical purchase groups (a collective endeavour) coexists with a number of practices and values/desires that are not necessarily reconcilable with the making of a new, more equitable, ecologically sound, world – for instance his view of society (and the world as a whole) as a *bellum omnium contra omnes* in which the law of the strongest (more than fittest) prevails. On the other, even if we saw Homica's efforts to live sustainably somehow 'individualised', it is also true that they always-already entail articulations that are collective (the son's education, his involvement in social movements like anti-vax mobilisation, environmentalist local protests against Prosecco monoculture, self-managed permaculture courses). This complexity suggests that whatever the *form* that the new environmentalism of everyday life takes ('individualised' vs. collectively organised), critical to a significant transition towards sustainability will be desires' capacity to coalesce and generate alternative, sustainable and less violent socio-material flows.

In line with what Groves et al. (2015) (but also: Schlosberg and Coles 2015) argue, my data seem to suggest that the more these will be present and available, the more actors will be involved and drawn to them. I have pointed out time and again how much the *desire* for change, for more equitable, fair and sustainable economies is voiced: Costantina and her tomatoes or the wood she would like to buy local; Chiara and her future in a sustainable and non-exploitative economy; Onurbio and his will to no longer see dead fishes full of plastic. These cries are often voiced with a hint of frustration because many of my participants *do not see* the solutions or alternatives. Yet, their bare existence points to a desire incubating, to a potentiality that is waiting to, literally, *materialise* (Sayer 2014; Hagbert and Bradley 2017).

In this context, it is worth mentioning the trope of *doing one's bit* for making a change, which was very recurrent throughout my data set. I believe that the effects of this commitment are telling with respect to the ambiguities of conceiving change at the micro level of everyday life. In an everyday that is innervated by market logics and individualism, the idea that "we are society and therefore we are responsible for changing it" becomes a call for responsible choices *within* the current system (consume organic, switch off the light, go vegan). In front of a society, politics and economy that are out of control, more than the lack of action that Fischer et al. (2012) observe, individual consumption choices take centre-stage as (the only) possible means in sight for making a difference. The issue with this framing is that it is depoliticising and remains within the coordinates of the same socio-economic flows that produced the problem in the first place. In some cases, and precisely where more investment is channelled towards assemblages of "sustainability" (Mirko and Elisa, Chiara; to a lesser extent Alberta), commitment to *do one's bit* even acquires bio-political overtones: it promotes (self-)disciplining according to the agenda of "environmental footprint" reduction. In other cases, as with Onurbio and Erika, desire is so far channelled and imbricated into unsustainable assemblages that possible and more sustainable alternatives to be enacted at the micro-level of everyday life are not even in sight – to a certain extent they do not exist and thus cannot be productive. So, *doing one's bit* cannot be but a formal, largely indifferent move – if it happens at all. Especially in these cases, the perceived inconspicuousness of any everyday action, taken in isolation, is so strong that a feeling of powerlessness sets in, and *doing one's bit* is accepted only in as far as it does not interfere with other (desiring) priorities.

But sometimes, a belief intervenes: as Valerio says, my action "is like a small drop in the ocean, *and yet*"... And yet, if more and more of these drops could coalesce, they might become significant. This belief is what can start to mobilise new collective movements, where micro actions can gain a civic and political aspect (Nelson et al. 2007; Schlosberg and Coles 2015). At this point, *doing one's bit* is no longer the disempowering feeling that all one can do is choosing among available alternatives; it is, instead, the modest recognition that one's contribution to change can only be partial, it should not be willed as universal and abstract rule. But knowing the contingency of one's emplacement in the world does not lead to a cynical attitude. A strong belief in the world and more vital ecologies forcefully seeks to "precipitate events" (Deleuze and Negri 1990) to make actual the virtual, to try and follow lines of flight that express desires for difference and becoming. And in a very concrete way: Homica's life experiments, that were not performances but the effort to make a practical change to how people thought about and used energy in their everyday lives; Laura's hope in the future because she is involved in the collective production of the *affordances* for a collective, material-social-economic-libidinal-sensuous, change to gradually happen (see Groves et al. 2015). Doing one's bit becomes doing one's *best*: the ethical fabulation of a world to come (Lambek 2010).

7.3. Methodological contributions

This thesis started with a research question – about sustainable transitions and everyday uses of energy in the context of the crisis. Throughout it, the field of "energy" has opened to embody many things, not reducible to narrow definitions that reduce it to electricity, gas, petrol, oil, wood; it has opened to energy embodied in objects; food; spiritual energy; life-energy; love, becoming. As energy has been made immanent to life, *life itself* has taken over the stage – moving us from concerns over environmental sustainability to questions over what is humanly, socially, ecologically sustainable (Smith and High 2017). I found that these may not be even heuristically distinguishable. It is common currency to think social and environmental sustainability as presupposing one another (e.g. Barry 2007); my ethnography suggests that this is true also at the micro-level of lived experience. I hope to have shown that there is no environmental sustainability without also the sustainability of the desiring, *fleshy*, aspects of (everyday) life. For nature is not 'out there': human beings are integral to ecological cycles and therefore 'environmental' destructiveness is also subjective, and vice versa (Guattari 2000).

These (un)conclusions have been possible thanks to the research methods that have been deployed. A sensuous ethnography: an immersion, full body and mind, within the assemblages that were forming as part of my research. It might have been quite unstructured, open as it was to the singularities and differences within the field. And yet it was putting my various lines (of researcher, of person, of child and adult, of woman and animal) fully in place and fully at risk. Interviews can investigate meanings, discourses and even practices and affects/emotions as they unfold through time; observations give us an idea – hands on – of people's extent, modality and preferences of energy use. (Un)personal immersion in the field can say something about the experiential messiness, complexity and singularity of energy assemblages, their constant openness to becoming but also their stickiness in and through desire. This is not to claim any sort of objectivity *over* or *about*, or empathic access to, the lives I have studied (Candea et al. 2015; Dicks 2014). Being there meant experiencing proximities, but also radical otherness. What I can claim is a knowledge (if partial, situated) of those assemblages my research had put in motion and the ways they affected me. Rejoicing, rejecting, feeling pleasure, being cold, feeling alive, tasting, admiring, intimacy, distance… these all sensitised me to the importance of *affects* to everyday life. In a radically empirical way, I realised that it is *senses (sensing, affecting and being affected)* that give *sense* to life: *Aesth-etics*. In this, the aid of different media was crucial because it afforded different affections to be expressed. By this kind of ethnography, I was brought to an uncompromising commitment to ecology as a matter, first of all, of trans-human vitality.

But importantly, I could not stop at the contingent here-and-there of daily life. Affects of sorrow call for critique, and critique for thought as a process of unravelling the presuppositions of sorrow and joy. I was brought forward: to questioning what was affecting me in different ways – to push inquiry beyond affects to objects, discourses, thoughts, places, histories, cultures. Rejoicing in walking with my bare feet on a flooded path was an affect, but beyond what was for me its beauty, I was pushed to reflect on dirtiness as contact with the materials that sustain our own existence, on the effects of a civilisation that increasingly sanitises its experience, and from this on the potentially transformative experience of intersecting my own body with soil, with a culture of the soil and a history made of molecular, "dirty" ways of assembling with it: not only in terms of agriculture but also of life-enjoyment – the beauty and intensity of the simple sensing of a lake. Of course, what thus became visible to me is situated and dependent on my own desire(s) (my becoming-child in the barefoot lake experience) and has never been constructed as a universally valid norm. It opened, nonetheless, *one* possible way of thinking an ecological transition: dirty life on the skin (see Bellacasa 2017).

Hence, somewhat differently to what often happens within "post-qualitative" research (e.g. Lather 2013), I have sought to combine the sheer potency of affects with thought, the being taken-over by data with the reflexive questioning of my own results and method. I have sought to map experience for highlighting both its openness and fluidity *and* its striated, territorialised, sticky aspects. In this process, I was helped by theory and philosophy: to see things differently, use concepts to produce a different reality, actualise virtualities that would have remained silent. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, that theory-infused research narrows the possibility of insight in the interest of fitting data to expected schemas, the concepts I have used, possibly because of their own nature, have been productive: instruments for opening my sense(s) to the new, even happy to be left aside (see Jackson and Mazzei 2012). Conceptualisation is fundamental, I believe, if we want to make the study of everyday energies *critical* as well as experience-near. For thought and concepts open us to the more-than-immediate. For the same reason, although my writing happens to be in line with experimental writing traditions in the social sciences, I have also sought to maintain intelligibility, clarity of argument. Surely, as with other authors, I have tried to convey arguments by means other than rationality (see Stewart 2007; Lather 1995; Seremetakis 1993). Yet, it would amount to a funnily unfortunate reversal to surrender the latter in favour of affects: our life is made of both.

Overall, this thesis relates not only to everyday energy use studies, but to different social sciences research approaches. To the nascent so-called "post-qualitative" tradition I propose a method that is able to respect the complexity of the social in all those aspects (material, libidinal, discursive) immanently present in everyday experience. I also contribute with a participative, observational, methodology beyond the interview – not much common in this field of the social sciences. To psychosocial studies I bring a view on desire as both revolutionary and normalising; a taste for *concrete* reality as it unfolds in the present; a deeper focus on the *socio-political* and *real* dimension of desire. Going beyond the individually subjective level opens new political opportunities as environmental social scientist: in recognising the intractability of desire one is not discouraged (nothing can change) or led to a disciplinary practice that tries to behaviourally align desire to societal expectation and professed values (Sayer 2014). Shifting attention to the systemic conditions that generate (environmentally damaging) subjectivities, we map the possibilities for social organisation to *collectively* be otherwise. I have finally proposed a method that could remain faithful to life-desire itself by *immanently* following desiring lines as they produce their own critique: lines of flight that materialise in conscious and unconscious bodily rebellions, which in turn indicate the need for new *social and political* emancipations (Marcuse 1992; Adorno 1973).

7.4. Looking ahead: Re-enchanting energy use (as method, as politics)

I would like to end with an image of “energy” that was sent to me by Homica, while I was far into the process of writing (interestingly, after I had written the first draft of this chapter).

It immediately reminded me of the following quote by Tim Ingold (2010: 9):

> Modern society, of course, is averse to such chaos. Yet however much it has tried, through feats of engineering, to construct a material world that matches its expectations – that is, a world of discrete, well-ordered objects – its aspirations are thwarted by life’s refusal to be contained. We might think that objects have outer surfaces, but wherever there are surfaces life depends on the continual exchange of materials across them. If, by ‘surfacing’ the earth or incarcerating bodies, we block that exchange, then nothing can live. In practice, however such blockages can never be more than partial and provisional. The hard surfacing of the earth, for example, is perhaps the most salient characteristic of what we conventionally call the ‘built environment’. On a paved road or concrete

> foundation, nothing can grow, unless provisioned from remote sources. Yet even the most resistant of materials cannot forever withstand the effects of erosion and wear and tear. Thus the paved surface, attacked by roots from below and by the action of wind, rain and frost from above, eventually cracks and crumbles, allowing plant growth through to mingle and bind once again with the light, air and moisture of the atmosphere. Wherever we choose to look, the active materials of life are winning out over the dead hand of materiality that would snuff it out.

There is a dandelion in the image. The spontaneous grass we ate together that night, one year and a half ago. But it is above all a flower. Lost in looking at a flower, Homica was suggesting me the conclusion to this study. A crack traverses the concrete. It is not only the crack of lively nature, but also that of desiring flights that cut through and away from the striated surface of socially determined life and the omnipresent, concrete-like, axiomatic of modernism/capitalism that coats our lives with too many, deceiving, wrappings (technological gadgets, concrete, clothes, bodily disciplines, roads…). It is life for-ever affirming itself not over others, but with others; *life affirming its right to be different and singular*. And is this dandelion not also an image of *desire itself*? Of that desire that is channelled, made compliant, closed into the boundaries of subject-Selves – and yet always *gushing*, productive, open to becoming? Expression of a desire of/for different ways of inhabiting energy and ecology, one that is not engineered but lives on, actively… and might thus produce the premises for more sustainable livelihoods that challenge voracious late capitalist assemblages.

I started from life – sensed, portrayed, produced. I have then put thought and affective apprehension in and through it to enrich the visibility of the real: from the particular and actual here-and-now to what was less immediately perceivable but no less present and real. I found myself back to Life, on another level, that of a cosmos in-becoming. Boundaries between human beings and nature have admittedly blurred time and again but not to be reduced to each other: this (non-)other thing that we call 'nature' came across as stubbornly different and rebellious. Against the politics of a disposable nature, I have argued that this potency claims for a re-enchantment of energy use: appreciation of the richness of every apparently banal object, practice, discourse (Hawkins 2009). An attitude that respects the affirmative potencies of life over their destructive manipulation, the force of difference against the indifference that crushes any-thing once subsumed by the abstract demands of capital and of a "modern society … averse to … chaos" (Ingold 2010: 9).

Change will need to be negotiated at many levels, and it will necessarily be ecologic, economic, political, social, cognitive, habitual, desiring. There is no easy answer to how, but it will probably be the result of processes of deterritorialisation that will find their moments of subjectification, events of becoming a collective. In this, the social scientist can work as catalyser, as producer, as expression of the myriad lines of flight that traverse, and define, our society: search for more direct, less mediated, relationships to the self, others, nature; divestment from the gadgets that occlude and fix the everyday flows of desire that look instead for a lighter freedom to move; less violence, more affects.

Let us not forget, though, the line I drew – fleeting as it might be – between nihilistic *will-to-power* and *will-to-potency*. Greatly as a result of the observations, experience and dialogues that have given rise to this thesis, I see the latter as radical openness to the multiform elements of the world, a process of becoming-with them that is vital and joyous because capable of forming alliances and creative assemblages. The affective intensity of the encounters that this drive produces is always an in-between of people and things, things and things. Hence, it cannot be destructive, it cannot seek for the annihilation of the other[313]. It is the intuition that 'my' life is nothing without being-together, becoming-imperceptible (see Bennett 2005; Haraway 2016)[314]. Assemblages innervated of this special kind of energy are characterised by a creative sort of vitalism because they are traversed by processes of becoming – which *then* open to the production of the new: an object sparkling an intuition for an invention, a taste spurring the production of a vegetable, someone initiating a different life trajectory, the warmth of the wood burning instituting a different relationship to the house.

Saying that this vitalism is "creative" does not clash with the logic of limit that sustainability seems to necessitate. It is not about the production of new material objects and not even experiences: it can be simply the production of, and openness to, the multifaceted, continuously changing, nature of the world and human experience (Zerzan 2002). Indeed, as the cases above have suggested, living life as permeated by the affective intensity of becoming has the result of blocking the chase for the always novel experiences, gadgets, goods and trans-human creatures that our "excited" society offers us. It makes us content with looking at a little flower, a picnic on the grass with

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[313] Although this does not always mean a 'happy' reconciliation: quite the contrary, it would also and always entail the difficulty of the encounter with the other. And yet, a *loved* one.

[314] Will-to-power cannot be a becoming-imperceptible, for it is always the affirmation of something (often one-Self), over others. It tends to annihilate otherness.

sandwiches, the sunsets out of the window. And when it does involve a material production, this is often micro-level, reproductive, "DIY", the vegetable garden, the knitted pull-over… because this is where the contact with things that an affectively infused life requires can be found.

Simultaneously, entering zones of proximities with the materials of the world puts us in the position of recognising experientially the Marxian intuition *that things also make us*. Not in the (quite problematic and rather obscure) sense that they "act back" on us, as if they had an obscure will to do things (Ingold 2010). But in the sense that, in becoming, human beings are continuously deterritorialised by things, gestures and perceptions. "*IDY*", as Homica once told me, would be a better phrase: It Does Yourself – and there is an uncanniness to this 'It' that is never quite reassuring or reconciled, that calls us to stand back, to stop doing, to stay still and wait. To do as little as possible, and with care. Because even the smallest gesture may change one's world so rapidly and unexpectedly that doing becomes frightening rather than the exciting; because objects may obstruct the senses rather than intensifying experience; because too many comforts make you a slave. But when an action does take place, when an object is born, when an experience is lived – then that, even the smallest, is replete with the beauty and wonder and intensity of singularity: an haecceity – no matter how apparently trivial and banal. It is in these encounters, in these events, that the everyday lives its own moments of dynamism, change and openness to the new.

As social scientists committed to making a change, we may be well served by a social analysis of *life* (in all of its affective, material and semiotic expressivity), rather than of *everyday* life – to the extent there is a difference between the two. For life makes us believe in the world and "[i]f you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume" (Deleuze and Negri 1990). Our task is thus to cultivate events, and to cultivate the collective spaces for desire to *become… wild and free ---- imperceptible.*

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Appendices

Appendix A – Localising a regional trajectory of capitalist development: a brief introduction to the North-East of Italy

Italy's so-called "North East" includes three regions: Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige (for the following discussion I rely, among others, on: Anastasia and Corò 2007; Marini 2012; Perulli e Pichierri 2010; Stella 2012; Vallerani and Varotto 2005). Vittorio Veneto is, unsurprisingly, in the Veneto region – some 50 kilometres respectively from the far more popular Venice and Cortina. The area was, from the decay of the Venetian Republic and up until post-WWII, very poor – a land of colonisation first and migration after. Economy mainly relied on agriculture, despite the fact that rather sub-optimal climate conditions rarely allowed abundant variety and yield. After WWII the area underwent two spurts of sudden growth, one in the 1960s and one in the 1980s. This was based on a small to medium size model of manufacturing industry, which developed prevalently in the sectors of furniture, clothes, domestic appliances. Even (and perhaps especially) people from disadvantaged backgrounds managed to set up and expand businesses – sometimes to the point of becoming multinationals (as in the case of world-famous Benetton). Single enterprises, in general, did not cluster to form bigger ones but remained loose and rather atomised.

Despite great wealth differentials, marked economic growth signalled a period of generalised affluence, confidence in the future, high (economic *and* libidinal) investment in capitalism. This process went hand in hand with a social discourse of individualism, autonomy, self-entrepreneurship, hard work, life fulfilment via accumulation of wealth, social advancement through money. The correlative has been a very materialistic and consumerist drive towards appropriation, consumption and lately display – not only of (conspicuous) commodities, but also of land, resources, labour. Industrialisation and urbanisation processes were poorly coordinated and thought through. Houses, warehouses, roads, towns, business (and later retail) parks… started to proliferate to the point of covering the land (especially the flat bits) in a close reticulum of buildings, streets and small fields. Nowadays, Veneto counts one of the largest conurbations in Europe, characterised by chaotic and inefficient urban sprawling, which in turn puts strains on local ecosystems[315]. Furthermore, natural resources and sink capacities have been exploited without hesitation by the growing industries, causing severe water and air pollution, among other things[316].

The growth of industries and affluence (and consumerism) were already beginning to crack at the turn of the millennium, as entrepreneurs in search of profits began to outsource or relocate their businesses in poor countries and manual workers began to lose their jobs (Anastasia and Corò 2007). But the 2008 financial crisis was the moment of a probably definitive defeat of the North East industrial model. All of a sudden, the small and medium businesses on which the territory still relied proved anachronistic and unable to face the forces of globalisation that push towards increasing centralisation and monopoly. Since then, the region's economy has been profoundly suffering, with many industries forced to close or strongly downsize. Since 2007, the region's GDP has dropped by more than 8%, families' consumption by 6%, investments' rate by 22%. 2014's GDP was inferior than 2000's (Corò and Toschi 2015). Between 2008 and 2014, 138,000 employed workplaces were lost, amounting to 5% of the total. If unemployment rates were around 3.4% in 2008, by 2013 they scored in the range of 7.7% (Micelli 2015). By 2016, Veneto scored a record in the number of suicides directly linked to the recession: 251, 18% of Italy's total[317]. Stagnation is ongoing.

Fewer jobs, together with a heightened cost of living mean that the crisis' effects are most evident in everyday life. Nonetheless, the North East remains affluent compared to other parts of Italy and Europe, with a relatively small number of extreme cases of poverty, still dynamic after all (Marini 2012). What makes it, then, an intense case for studying sustainable transitions within the context of the economic crisis? Arguably, the most profound and unsettling consequences are better understood in terms of "structure of feeling" (Williams 2013: 64-65) rather than of wealth *per se*. What changed, together with the numbers in bank accounts, were expectations, values, hopes and faiths. All that was strongly invested in – expanding and continuing economic growth, property, etc. – crumbled (Micelli 2015; Corò and Toschi 2015). Even for the people who were able to

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[315] http://statistica.regione.veneto.it/Pubblicazioni/QualitaAbitativa/Capitolo2.html

[316] Despite the downsides of this kind of 'growth' (for lack of a better term) are becoming inescapably evident, the tragedy of our recent history is now repeating itself, maybe again as tragedy, with the boom of Prosecco. In an era of proliferating talk about sustainability, food autonomy, organic and differentiated agriculture, land preservation, etc., Veneto is buying into monoculture, pesticides, herbicides, fertilisers, deforestation… All of them put to the service of farmers' short-term acquisitiveness. A process that does not come without resistance.

[317] https://www.vvox.it/2016/09/11/crisi-veneto-prima-regione-per-suicidi/

go on living as they always did, a feeling of uncertainty set in, a fear of being the next one to crack, the sudden insecurity about all that used to be taken for granted. For this reason the crisis was more deeply *felt* here than in less affluent and industrialised regions.

Appendix B – relationship with participants

Appendix B contains the documents that have supported recruitment phase:

1. Letter circulated throughout associations and other civil society groups to involve participants
2. Leaflet
3. Information sheet
4. Informed consent form

1 - Letter circulated throughout associations and other civil society groups to involve participants

Richiesta di supporto per progetto di ricerca sul territorio

Buongiorno,

Sono una studentessa di Sociologia alla Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.
Sto facendo un Dottorato di Ricerca (PhD) sul rapporto tra la crisi economica e la sostenibilità ambientale e ho deciso di svolgere le mie ricerche sul campo (fieldwork) a Vittorio Veneto, mia città natale.

Devo reclutare partecipanti per questo progetto e mi domandavo se vi fosse possibile aiutarmi in qualche modo.
Avete una newsletter per i vostri soci e/o sostenitori? Se sì, vi sarebbe possibile, in una di queste, includere anche un piccolo annuncio (eventualmente in forma di flyer) che ho preparato per cercare dei volontari?
In caso contrario, avreste dei suggerimenti alternativi? Per esempio, avete in programma eventi in cui io possa far circolare il mio volantino?

Il vostro aiuto sarebbe molto prezioso.

Resto in attesa di un Vostro gentile riscontro.
Un cordiale saluto,
alice dal gobbo

** Plea of support for a research project in the area**

Hello,

I am a Sociology student at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.
I am a PhD student and my research project inquires around the relationship between the economic crisis and environmental sustainability. The designated area for fieldwork is Vittorio Veneto, my home town.

I am looking for people willing to take part in my study. Would you like to help me with this in any way?
If you have a newsletter that you circulate around your associates/supporters, could you send around the flyer you find attached?
Or else, do you have any suggestions? Are there scheduled events to which I might bring some of my flyers?

Your help would be sincerely appreciated.

Looking forward to hearing from you,
alice dal gobbo

2 – Leaflet

Cerco volontari per progetto di ricerca sul rapporto tra crisi economica e sostenibilità ambientale

Sono una studentessa di Dottorato alla Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.
Sto portando avanti un progetto di ricerca multimediale sul rapporto tra la crisi economica e la sostenibilità ambientale.

Cerco persone che vivano nel comune di Vittorio Veneto e di età superiore ai 18 anni, disposte a svolgere in mia compagnia parte delle attività quotidiane di una giornata ordinaria.
La durata del coinvolgimento nel mio progetto non è fissa e sarà concordata insieme a seconda dei vostri impegni e delle vostre preferenze.
Se siete interessati, contattatemi ai recapiti sotto indicati per un incontro prelimanare in cui vi spiegherò senza impegno il progetto e le modalità di svolgimento.

Alice Dal Gobbo

Tel: 3357594720

Email: DalGobboA@cardiff.ac.uk

Per ulteriori inforamzioni vedi il sito web:
http://www.walesdtc.ac.uk/profiles/pathway/social-policy/#dal-gobbo-alice

3 – Information sheet

Sono una studentessa alla Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, iscritta ad un PhD (Dottorato di Ricerca) in Sociologia. Mi sto occupando di un progetto multimediale sulla sostenibilità ambientale, sovvenzionato dall'Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) del Regno Unito.

Attraverso la mia ricerca vorrei esplorare se e in che modo la crisi economica ha avuto delle ripercussioni sull'utilizzo quotidiano di energia; questo ha lo scopo di comprendere gli eventuali processi di cambiamento nei consumi e nel rapporto con l'ambiente che stanno avvenendo nell'area di Vittorio Veneto - Conegliano.

Lo studio si compone di due fasi. La prima fase si basa sull'osservazione di attività quotidiane: a te, come partecipante, chiedo la disponibilità a farti "seguire" durante una tua giornata ordinaria (in modalità e tempi che definiremo insieme); se e quando lo desidererai, parteciperò alle tue attività. Ti farò anche delle domande a proposito di ciò che starai/staremo facendo e prenderò alcune note. Se per te non sarà un problema, registrerò parte delle nostre conversazioni e insieme faremo delle fotografie.

La seconda fase avrà luogo dopo una settimana circa. I tempi verranno concordati insieme. Si tratterà di un'intervista in cui approfondiremo i temi emersi durante la prima fase; durerà all'incirca un'ora e mezza. Questa intervista potrebbe svolgersi "in movimento", per esempio camminando. Se sei d'accordo, utilizzerò una videocamera per registrarla tutta o in parte.

La mia ricerca non dovrebbe implicare nessun rischio fisico o psicologico. Tuttavia, è possibile che la partecipazione ti diventi difficile a causa di motivi imprevisti. Per cercare di fare in modo che questo non accada, concorderemo insieme i tempi e i modi in cui svolgere le nostre attività.

Ricorda comunque che la tua partecipazione è assolutamente volontaria e potrai ritirarti in qualsiasi momento e per qualsiasi motivo. Mi impegnerò a fare in modo che tu ti senta libero di farlo.

Farò tutto il possibile per mantenere l'anonimità e la riservatezza dei dati che produrremo: il tuo nome sarà sostituito con uno pseudonimo e non sarà riconducibile da terzi al materiale (a meno che tu non desideri esplicitamente il contrario); tutti i dati verranno archiviati su un supporto dotato di password a cui soltanto io potrò accedere. Dal momento che il mio progetto include l'utilizzo di materiale audiovisivo, voci suoni o immagini catturati durante la ricerca potrebbero essere inclusi nella sua presentazione: se per te dovesse essere un problema, il materiale relativo alla tua partecipazione non sarà incluso.

I risultati della ricerca saranno esposti in una tesi che verrà presentata alla mia università come completamento del mio PhD. Potrebbero anche essere pubblicati in riviste, raccolte o monografie di natura accademica, il cui accesso è pubblico.

Nel caso dovessi avere perplessità o domande a proposito dello svolgimento della ricerca, sentiti libero di pormeli in qualsiasi momento, anche via email o telefono.

Inoltre, potrai contattare il responsabile del comitato etico della mia facoltà (Chair of the School Ethics Committee):

Adam Hedgecoe
hedgecoeam@cardiff.ac.uk
+44 29208 70027

I am a PhD student at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences. I am carrying out a multimedia research project on environmental sustainability, with the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council.

I am interested in investigating whether and how the economic crisis has had an impact on everyday uses of energy; the aim is to better understand processes of change in consumption patterns and relationship to the environment that might be happening in the area of Vittorio Veneto – Conegliano.

My study is structured in two phases. The first entails observation of everyday activities: to you, as participant, I would ask to let myself spend time with you during a normal day of your life (the modalities and timings will be decided upon together); if and when you are happy to, I will participate to your activities as well. I will ask you some questions and take notes regarding what you are doing. If this is not a problem, I will also record part of our interactions and take some photographs.

The second part of the study will roughly take place one week after. We will arrange this together. In this occasion I will interview you as a way to expand on some of the themes emerge in the first part. The interview will last around one and a half hours and it might be carried out while walking. If you are happy with this, I will bring a camera along to film it – as a whole or in part.

There is no physical or psychological risk foreseeable in the design of my research. Nonetheless, unexpected issues might make participation difficult for you. We will plan together time and modalities of our research encounter as a way of preventing this.

Do anyway remember that participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time and for any reason. I will do my best for making you feel free to do so.

I am committed to keep the data that we are going to produce anonymous and reserved. I will use a pseudonym instead of your name and the latter will not be traceable to the material – unless you explicitly prefer that this does not happen. All data will be kept in a secure drive, protected by a password known to me alone. I use audio and video material, hence images, sounds and/or voices might be present in the final outputs: if this is a problem for you, those related to our encounter will not be included.

The results of my research will be presented in a thesis that I will submit to my university as part of the completion of the PhD program. They might also be published in academic journals and books to which there is public access.

In case you have any question regarding the research, feel free to ask at any time, also via email or telephone.

Furthermore, you can contact the chair of the School Ethics Committee:

Adam Hedgecoe
hedgecoeam@cardiff.ac.uk
+44 29208 70027

4 – Informed consent form

Certificazione di consenso informato

Sono stato/a invitato/a a prendere parte al progetto di ricerca che Alice Dal Gobbo sta intraprendendo nell'ambito del suo Dottorato di Ricerca (PhD) presso la facoltà di Scienze Sociali dell'Università di Cardiff. L'indagine si concentra sull'uso quotidiano dell'energia nell'ambito della crisi economica.
Dopo aver discusso con Alice le modalità di partecipazione, e aver letto il foglio informativo in cui si presentano i dettagli della stessa, ho accettato di prendere parte al progetto.
Accetto che nel corso dei nostri incontri i dialoghi siano, almeno in parte, registrati; che Alice scatti delle fotografie e/o riprenda alcune delle attività intraprese insieme. Accetto inoltre che le registrazioni possano essere trascritte e che parte del materiale possa essere riprodotto nella presentazione dei risultati della ricerca, sia all'interno della tesi che in altre pubblicazioni accademiche (per es. riviste specializzate). Sono consapevole della possibilità di ritirarmi in qualsiasi momento dal progetto e di discutere apertamente con Alice di qualsiasi problema o disagio che le sue attività mi arrecassero. Sono inoltre consapevole che tutti i dati saranno trattati in modo confidenziale e anonimo (salvo accordi diversi).

Nome e cognome___________________
Firma____________________
Data_____________

Informed consent

I have been invited to take part to Alice Dal Gobbo's PhD research project, which she is carrying out at the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences. This is about everyday uses of energy in the context of the economic crisis.
After discussing with Alice modalities and details of participation, and having read the information sheet, I accept to take part to the project.
I accept that during our encounters dialogues might be in part recorded and that Alice takes photographs of some of the activities carried out together. I also accept that the recordings can be transcribed and that part of the material might be reproduced as a way of presenting and disseminating research results, both in the PhD thesis and in other academic outputs (e.g. journals). I am aware that it is possible to withdraw from the study at any moment and that I might talk freely to Alice of any problem or distress participation might imply for me. I am also aware that data are going to be treated anonymously and confidentially unless explicitly agreed.

Name and Surname___________________
Signature____________________
Date_____________

Appendix C – Fieldwork and analysis

Appendix C contains:

1. Interview protocol
2. Transcription conventions

1 – Interview protocol

The interview protocol is indicative since it largely varied according to the participant and the nature of the observation day. As this is not a verbatim transcription, it is reported in English for transparency.

1) Follow-up from first encounter: thoughts, feelings, emotions, discomforts, puzzles… relative to the first phase

- Is there anything you want to say / reflect upon in relation to the first time we met and what we did?
- Anything you want to ask?
- Was anything troubling or discomforting about what we did / talk about?
- Has anything triggered much recurring thoughts?

2) Dialogue on participants' images of energy:

- Talk me about your picture(s)
- Why did you take it / choose it?
- What were you doing when you took it?
- What is the significance of this image for you?

3) Semi-structured interview

- *Present*:

– Also in relation to what we have just discussed, what comes to your mind if I just say "energy"?

– What place in your life would you situate energy in? What role has this energy got in your everyday life?

- *Past*:

– Think about the habits we observed and experienced together, but also about energy more generally: have they always been part of your life?; what about your childhood?

– Have they changed in time?

– And, if so, what were the main triggers of such changes (technological, social, family…)?

- Do you think these changes have been positive, negative, neutral in terms of your everyday life?
- *Present*:
- Is there something about your everyday energy practices that you would like to change?
    - If yes: do you find it difficult or easy to do so?; do you believe you’ve managed to realise steps in your desired direction?
    - If no: is it because you are happy about the way you live, or because you think change is unfeasible? Or anything else?
- I would like to consider now the issue of the financial crisis:
    - What was your experience of it?
    - Has it entailed any change in your everyday life? Did any significant event take place in your life because of it? Or maybe less conspicuous but still profound transitions are in place?
    - Do you think it has changed your relationship to energy? If yes, in what ways? Have you experienced such changes as purely negative, or do you think they also introduced new and positive ways of engaging with energy and more generally the world around you?
- *Future*:
- Has the experience of the crisis brought a change in the way you imagine your future, as well as society’s futures as well?
- Think about you, or your children, in 20 or 50 years time: what can you imagine will happen?
- And do you think our uses of energy will be similar to now, or very different?
- Do you have any hope or wish for the future?

4) Concluding remarks
    - Is there anything else you’d like to add to this conversation, or ask me?
    - If not, I would like to thank you for your time and dedication. Your help has been very important to me. Please feel free to contact me in case you have any queries or are curious about how the work is going along.

2 – Transcription conventions

Interviews were transcribed in full and verbatim.
I have tried to maintain as much as possible se sense of live speech and punctuation has been used to this end.

Further:

- Underlying indicates emphasis
- Relevant observations from interview clips are indicated in [square brackets]
- I also report in [square brackets] notes about non-verbal communication/expression
- Interruptions are indicated as such: ---
- Overlapping speech is signalled by an indentation
- Isolated ellipses … indicate stretches of text/talk are being omitted.

Appendix D – Background material from analysis

Appendix D contains two pieces of support for analysis, they form the background for better understanding the context in which the corresponding sections develop:

3. Some notes on the Cimbri
4. A tour with the *casaro*

1 – Some notes on the Cimbri

Cimbri are a population that arrived to Northern Italy in early Medieval times, when they were sent as colonies from Holland. They settled in some areas of the Veneto and Trentino, where they used to live in rural villages, working the land. They have maintained their own language and culture throughout the centuries. The different settlements had different destinies, but most of them were forced to emigrate or disperse especially since the 1800s because of: economic difficulties, state educational policies, WWI (the main Austrian front against Italy was right where their villages were). Apparently since the beginning of the 1800s a small group settled in Cansiglio. They lived off the forest and wood manufacturing, which was exchanged with neighbouring populations. I quote from a website that their association has established (translation is mine):

For a long time the community lived in isolation and did not seek to establish relationships with the local communities, out of a deep sense of social independence. […] as a testimony of their proud and sense of independence and isolation, it is enough to remind of the story of the old cimbra Santina Azzalini (who was 80 years old at the time). Forced to leave the forest to go and live with relatives in Spert [a village of the Alpago, the area where Valerio lives], moved from the call of solitude, she often went back (daily, during her final years) to spend hours of tranquillity and meditation [my emphasis] where she was born and spent her youth. And to those who tried to dissuade her she would say time and again: 'I'd like to die up there where my dear parents died, I would like to die on wood and not in a modern mattress'. […] She was found lying dead on a deathbed made of faggot: it was 3rd November 1962. They talked a language similar to German […] but it was the Cimbra language, new and unknown to neighbours that, nonetheless, gradually split apart to eventually die out during this century. This was partly because of marriages and commercial exchanges and even more because of schooling. In time, also the civilisation closeby started to have an influence especially on younger generations, who looked for more civilised housing in the nearby Osigo [where Costantina lives], Fregona and Mezzavilla, at least to spend the long winters there. […] The 1917-18 invasion and Nazi devastations pushed a great part of the Cimbri out of the forest and towards new economic activities: osterie, inns, hotels; only the old people of the scatolera tradition remained and built the villages of Pian dell'Osteria, Canaie, Campon, Le Rotte and Vallorch. (http://cimbridelcansiglio.it/i-cimbri/le-origini/)

2 – A tour with the casaro

We can better get to know the cooperative where Laura works through some nots from my tour of the dairy with the "*casaro*" (dairy man, in dialect), which Laura has arranged for me because she thought it would be relevant and interesting. I meet him just outside the shop around midday, later than expected because this has been a very hectic morning since a person from the staff was missing. He is a robust, middle-aged man, with a nice and warm face.

He seems happy to have someone to explain how things work to. Today, the cooperative counts 12 associates, scattered around six local Councils: Cison, Tarzo, Revine Lago, Vittorio Veneto, Sarmede and Fregona. Most of the milk produced (around 200hl every day) comes from cows; less from goats and even less from a few sheep whose owner lives in Revine Lago. All the milk gets transformed into cheese. The law would allow them to buy up to 49% of the milk from non-associates, but they prefer everyone to be part of the cooperative for bureaucratic reasons. Each associate pays a fee each year and then the cooperative takes care of going to their houses and collect the milk: the lorries work on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday – so that during the weekend the dairy is empty. The milk gets elaborated as the milk arrives. ... Overall, they produce more or less 15 different types of cheese, plus ricotta, yoghurt and mozzarella. 65% of the production is sold in the shop and the rest goes to wholesalers and then to shops and supermarkets. ... He asks me whether I want to see the dairy, even if now there are no people working. I am glad to do that. We go in and pass by the cheese shop. We walk along the corridor, a little dark; red clinkers on the floor. It's cool here because of the air conditioning. While we walk, I ask him for how long has the cooperative existed for: since 1928. It used to be a "latteria turnaria", where associates would bring milk and, according to the quantity, they would in turn go and work to make cheese; then they'd get the corresponding allocation. Now, since 50 years, it's a cooperative. ... Every month, plenary meetings with the associates take place; there is a president and a vice-president... but most of the decisions are made by himself and the president. ... It is not very easy, in fact, for most of them to understand and make decisions because they do not have direct and practical experience. But if there are important choices to be made – like buying a new machinery – the thing gets discussed altogether. Unfortunately nowadays producers are rather disinterested, they no longer feel the cooperative as something that is also theirs, despite it being still so. Before, when the dairy was a latteria turnaria, it was different because *everybody would contribute and help directly. ... But other things have changed, as well: for instance, until some time ago, almost everybody in this area had a cow at home, from which they'd make milk. And the cooperative would count up to 200 associates. Everybody would bring their milk. Now, instead, it's changed: less stables but with more cows in each. So the quantity of milk has not really changed – actually, it's increased – but producers are much less. But people complain about them as well, because they are often in the villages and the stables smell and people don't like that… but, good God, ideally replies the casaro, they want good milk but without the smell… how do they think that could be possible?! The production method has, instead, remained the same – at least in as far as he is concerned. He keeps making cheese as he had learnt to, and the thing seems to work well. What's changed is the quality of the milk. Today, he tells me, it's far better: there is far more hygiene in the stables and this helps. In the past, farmers would be content with milking, and that was it.*

As I walk with him through the rooms and corridors where the cheese is produced, I pass different atmospheres, smells, sensations: the aging room which is cool and relatively dry; the room where freshly curdled cheese is salted, warm humid and permeated by a sweet smell – *it's the milk!*, the casaro replies to my exclamation of pleasure; the large space where all the machinery is, filled with stainless steel iron formed in the variety of shapes that suit the various phases of cheese production. He talks to me about how different molecules and yeasts and temperatures work, the skill you need to *follow* them and the know-how of the different chemicals that are needed for a cheese to come out just as you want. I can feel his passion, but also some concern in his voice: *it's becoming harder and harder*. Although from his talk the dairy comes across as a rather solid business, revenues seem to be decreasing because of the increasing water and energy expenses – which have increased by five, while the cheese price has definitely not followed the trend. *So I ask him whether they have ever thought of growing as a business. He says no. there were opportunities in the past, but they did not want. This is, particularly, the worse period. Today, either you are small and you manage to keep going with the work of a few people, or you need to have an industry. Either very small, or very big. Middle-range things just do not survive. And he is not interested in industry anyway, he likes to do things by himself and look for quality.*